

Pushing Boundaries: Young People's Experiences Developing and Expressing
Intersecting Identities

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Joan DeJaeghere

July 2021

Acknowledgments

This dissertation has been a journey. Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Joan DeJaeghere, and committee members, Dr. Frances Vavrus, Dr. J.B. Mayo, Jr., and Dr. Peter Demerath for sticking with me through all the twists and turns.

Thank you to Megan, Sheetal, Heidi, Vanessa, and Laura for giving me feedback on each chapter. A special thank you to Heidi, Devleena, and Hanna for your patience in reading my work as it has progressed from ideas to words on pages.

Thank you to Dr. Murray Jensen for making sure that I had the funding necessary to complete my dissertation and for exposing me to the world of Anatomy and Physiology education research.

Thank you to all the research participants. Without your stories, there would be no dissertation!

Last, but not least, thank you to the humans and animals who have brightened my days and have given me the strength to do what needs to be done- my therapist, Blueberry, my partner, my parents, and my worms (who I like to discuss when other people talk about their children).

Abstract

While discussion of intersectional identities has entered popular media, very few scholarly works on young peoples' experiences with gender, sexual, and racial identities have been published in the past decade (Bettie, 2014; Lee, 2009; Pascoe, 2007). This dissertation responds to that gap and presents findings from a two-part qualitative study about identities and education. This dissertation focuses on the ways young people navigate boundaries that family members and classmates maintain around racial, gender, and sexual identities. The data discussed and presented in this dissertation comes mainly from nine life story interviews (see Atkinson, 1998) with adults from the Lindy Hop community who were asked to think back on how their families, educational experiences, friends, and social media impacted their identity formation. Additional data was collected from one student participant who shared her stories through a social media diary, a photovoice activity, and two rounds of interviews. The interviews reveal that young people encounter boundaries around their gender, sexual, and racial identity possibilities maintained by family members, community members, or classmates. The participants navigated these boundaries by pushing against them, moving beyond them, or strategically silencing aspects of their identities in different spaces. The findings suggest that young people make conscious decisions about how to engage with identity possibilities and enact agency in ways that are reflective of boundaries and privileges around their intersecting identities. The stories of these ten participants help to fill a gap in research on how young people engage with identity possibilities enacted by family, schooling, and social media as they construct their racial, gender, and sexual identities.

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Chapter 1: Establishing the Critical Issue

I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own. I am not free as long as any person of Color remains chained. Nor is any one of you.

– Audre Lorde

Introduction

Some of us may look back positively at school and see it as a time of personal identity formation and growth. Others may recall it as a gauntlet to be run, survived, and then pushed far into the depths of our memories. In either case, it has often been through our relationships with other young people, parents, guardians, educators, and school administrators that we¹ have been initially exposed to identity possibilities and the boundaries that demarcate which identities are available to us. We have faced the decision of whether to construct our identities within these boundaries or to struggle against them and step into the borderlands. We may have found information and spaces through social media in which to live out identity possibilities beyond the proscribed boundaries. We may even have embodied these identities beyond the confines of social media spaces.

¹ I use the words “we” and “us” to indicate that, while this dissertation discusses the experiences of specific participants, the findings of this study can be extended to all of us.

It is with these power relations of family, school, students, and social media in mind that I embarked on this research on identity development at home, at school, and on social media. While education through school and social media shape the ways many participants of this study (including myself) have constructed their identities, we did not necessarily recognize it while at school. It is only in recollecting our experiences with schooling through an interview that we began to see what roles education played in constructing our identities. In school, this happened through formative experiences such as being criticized for transgressing gender boundaries, interacting with classmates of different racial or ethnic backgrounds, or finding acceptance from certain teachers. On social media, we learned about new identity possibilities through observing other people's experiences, engaging with fanfiction, and participating in activist and learning groups. Within our families, we learned how to embody or negotiate around values taught to us by our elders. My own experiences and those of other participants in this research all illustrate the influence of family roles and expectations, administrator and educator beliefs, student hierarchies, and information from social media in ways that are both similar and divergent from those discussed in the literature.

Behaviors concerning student hierarchies and power relations between administration, educators, and students, including the hidden curriculum, affect our understandings of acceptable identity possibilities. During her research, Pascoe (2007) observed sexual harassment between male and female young people that she considered a form of hegemonic masculinity-affirming behavior. Kendall (2012) also discussed comments about queer people and rape jokes that went uninterrupted by educators in the sexuality education classrooms that she observed, clearly drawing boundaries around

possible sexual orientations. Lee (2009) described constant racist comments and tensions between White², Black, and Asian students that were ignored by teachers and administrators in the school where she studied model minority stereotypes, illustrating policing and reinforcement of racial identity expressions. In her study of gender, race, and class, Bettie (2014) observed several instances in which teachers and other students denigrated working-class students by criticizing what they identified as social and cultural failings that perpetuated poverty. Based on their findings and my own experiences working at schools, I believe that hidden curricula in US schools, homes, and online often unintentionally support young people's development of hegemonic masculinity, heterosexism, and racism rather than inclusive and intersectional forms of identity. By leaving such attitudes and behaviors unaddressed, I hypothesize that these hidden curricula at schools, at home, and on social media may also reinforce the boundaries that marginalize people outside of the "mythical norm" of "White, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure" from a young age (Lorde, 2012, p. 108). If this is so, teaching young people to reject those individuals whose identities are not represented within the assumed boundaries of possible identities may contribute to a culture in which identity-based harassment and violence are normalized. Additionally, people whose identities are not represented may have difficulty finding spaces in which

² The 7th edition of the APA Publication Manual capitalizes all racial and ethnic terms. I capitalize White and Black as well as Asian American as White and Black are racial terms in this context (<https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities>). There is much debate about the capitalization of White and Whiteness, as it has often been capitalized by White supremacists. However, as several Black scholars observe, when scholars choose to capitalize Whiteness, they may both take that linguistic power away from White supremacists while also placing more weight on the impact of Whiteness in society (see <https://www.macfound.org/press/perspectives/capitalizing-black-and-white-grammatical-justice-and-equity>, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/time-to-capitalize-blackand-white/613159/>, etc).

to be their whole selves, expressing parts of their identities in different spaces and negotiating their identities in the borderlands.

As conversations around race, sexual orientations, and gender identities continue to shift through increased focus on Black Lives Matter and the MeToo movement, the ways that people make sense of themselves as racialized, gendered, and sexual beings, may shift as well. During the past few years, resources about Whiteness and antiracism, gender identities, and sexual orientations have also entered media conversations for people of all ages. Booklists of recommended readings on Whiteness and antiracism spread widely in the Spring and Summer of 2020. With over one hundred podcasts about relationships, gender identities, sexuality, and sexual orientations available in apple podcasts in 2020, it is apparent that there is a general interest among podcast producers and listeners in both discussing and learning about these topics. Video platforms (i.e. Netflix, Disney Plus, Amazon Video) have created designated sections for films about Black historical figures, Black experiences in America, and to feature Black filmmakers in 2020. In addition, Netflix shows such as Big Mouth, Sex Education, and Bonding offer entertaining ways to gain knowledge about adolescence, relationships, gender identities, and sexuality while simultaneously addressing the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status. As a wider range of representations of racial, gender, and sexual identities become more present in mainstream film, TV, and new media, young people gain more information about identity possibilities and spaces in which to construct their identities.

Messages about racial, gender, and sexual identities embedded in hidden curricula in the US

School is one space where young people construct their identities.

Simultaneously, the hidden curriculum is at play in all aspects of schooling as teachers and students engage with official and hidden curricula that outline the boundaries of possible identities and often reinforce heteronormative, masculinist, and racist beliefs about students' futures (Bettie, 2014; Pascoe, 2007). These lessons are appropriated by students and carried into the hallways, other classrooms, and student-teacher interactions, which all convey messages about what are considered appropriate expressions of identities within school spaces.

Research indicates that teachers and students often reinforce White, heteronormative, or gender normative messages through the hidden and evaded curricula, or unspoken and avoidant behaviors, within their classrooms and schools (Bettie, 2014; Fields, 2008; Kendall, 2012). These heteronormative, gendered messages, in turn, shape the gender identities and sexual orientations, or personal understandings of sexuality, of young people. In other words, racist, heterosexist, and cis-normative comments that go unaddressed by the teacher, and questions from young people that are avoided or brushed aside send messages to young people about identity possibilities that are available to them (Fields, 2008).

As discussed in Kendall's (2012) research in sexuality education classrooms across the U.S., young people are exposed to lessons about ways in which sexual and gender identities may be expressed at home, within their communities, and from the media. All of these boundaries around gender and sexual identity possibilities are brought

to school and validated or silenced by official and hidden curricula. While the official or hidden curriculum may limit some identity possibilities, Young people, at the same time, face contradictory messages at school and the current intersectional media messages that young people consume, which may be disrupting the dominant White, cisgender, heterosexual, male narrative (Allen, 2011b; Fields, 2008; Kendall, 2012; Tanksley, 2016). I wonder how these different factors affect young people's identity development.

Research Questions

It is in light of the current growth of community activism about police murders of Black and Brown people, sexual harassment in workplaces, and the rights of transgender individuals and expansion of new media pertaining to race, gender, and sexuality that I study the following overarching question: How do young people engage with identity possibilities enacted by family, schooling, and social media as they construct their racial, gender, and sexual identities? Narrowing my focus to the areas of school, home, and media, I ask these questions:

1. How are boundaries around possible identities for young people defined and maintained in varying spaces throughout their lives?
2. How do young people enact agency in their expressions of identities within these spaces?

Research Sites

This research took place with participants from two very different settings – student participants recruited from a health classroom at Deep River Central School (DRCSD) in Northern New York State and with adult members of the Lindy Hop and Balboa community in Minneapolis-Saint Paul through Zoom calls. The school has been

anonymized to protect the identities of participants. After collecting data from DRCS D, COVID 19 caused schools to move to an online model. Under these circumstances, I chose to include life story interviews with adults over Zoom rather than attempting to continue working with students. The adult members of the Lindy Hop and Balboa community were asked to reflect on how they developed their identities (gender, racial, and sexual) and how education may or may not have impacted this process. While the research at DRCS D captured student experiences in the moment, adding adult retrospective interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of how people make sense of their identities across time and space. In addition, narratives of people who are further along in their identity development brought more clarity to how family, school, and peers affirmed or limited participants' expressions of their identities.

Deep River Central School District (DRCS D) is located in northern New York State. As someone who attended K-12 public school in this district and was employed as a permanent substitute teacher in the recent past, I find this space particularly interesting for a study of racial identities, gender identities, and sexual orientations. Currently, DRCS D is establishing policies and practices to adhere to the New York State Dignity for All Students Act (DASA), which works to protect young people from bullying and other violations of dignity based on their race, religion, nation of origin, gender identity and sexual orientation among many other factors.

I approached this part of my study as a youth-oriented anti-bullying project to learn about young peoples' experiences coming of age in a rural, conservative school district and to better understand if DASA policies are effective for young people in their current form. As health classes were offered in both seventh and tenth grades at DRCS D,

I worked specifically with these grade levels and observed health classes, which included classes taught by a visiting sexuality educator, during my time at the school.

At the time of this study, DRCSD had only White teachers and a very high proportion of students were White. Within the seventh and tenth grade health classes that I observed, there were a total of three Black students and four ethnically Bosnian students who generally presented as White. There were two openly queer teachers in the school and three openly queer students in the health classes that I observed. The visiting sexuality educator is also assumed by students to be queer, and he teaches them content on a large variety of gender and sexual identity possibilities. Outside of that content, he teaches a scientific and fear-based comprehensive sexuality education curriculum from Planned Parenthood. Students often carry information from these presentations out of the classroom and into the hallways where they joke about queerness, thus maintaining boundaries around available identity possibilities at DRCSD.

The second site, the Lindy Hop and Balboa community, is unique for its historical background and present-day racial makeup. As Lindy Hop students are taught in our first lessons and consistently throughout our learning process, Lindy Hop is a historically Black dance that came into being in the 1930s and 40s in Harlem at the Savoy Ballroom. According to the only Black Lindy Hop instructor in Minneapolis, Lindy Hop experienced a revival starting in the 1980s when a group of White people saw old movies of Lindy Hop and contacted the last living dancers – Norma Miller, Al Minns, and Frankie Manning. At their request, Al Minns and then Frankie Manning began to teach a new group of interested dancers who were predominantly White. The people who learned from Frankie Manning in the 1980s are now the instructors and leaders of a new

community of Lindy Hoppers, who are also mostly White. As described in some participant narratives, for the past few years, the Lindy Hop community has been reckoning with how systemic racism has been integrated into the hierarchy of the new community. Recently, the community has begun calling out members who have perpetrated sexual harassment or violence in the age of MeToo. Simultaneously, the Lindy Hop community in Minneapolis has become a space in which some people have begun to perform gender identities and sexual orientations that they subsequently carry into other spaces in their lives. It is with people from this space that I carried out the second half of my data collection to explore how gender, racial and sexual identities are formed through time and space.

Positionality

This dissertation has been a journey, beginning in Western China and ending right here in my living room in Minneapolis. I first went to Western China in 2008 as part of a study-abroad course led by my uncle. I couldn't speak Putonghua Chinese and had no idea what was going on, but when we arrived in Shangrila, I felt like I had finally found home. I refocused my life around learning Chinese so that I could go back there and learning to teach English so that I could contribute something that people wanted. I felt more comfortable than I had ever felt in the US when I was in Western China, living and working in Chinese and Tibetan cultural spaces. Sometimes I would be surprised to look in the mirror and see that I was still a White US citizen. But I was also very conscious of being an outsider, especially when people said things about me and laughed at me in Chinese assuming that I did not understand.

I thought that I would be able to live there forever, crossing boundaries between Chinese and Tibetan spaces and being a part of both. Unfortunately, my work with Tibetan students in Qinghai was controversial and after four years, it became clear that the local government no longer wanted me there. I dreamed of returning to Qinghai, the place I left to attend the University of Minnesota, to conduct my dissertation research as a contribution to Tibetan women's efforts to address patriarchy and improve their quality of life. However, throughout my time in this Ph.D. program, it became clear to me that I will not be allowed to spend more than 30 days at a time in China for the foreseeable future. Knowing that I cannot go back to live in Qinghai is a struggle that I am learning to cope with. As a White person in the US, I feel strange and sometimes unwelcomed entering Chinese or Tibetan spaces in Minneapolis, even if I am invited. I have packed away my experiences in Qinghai and share them only in tiny snippets of stories. I feel like I am losing a part of myself, like the world has put up boundaries around where I can go and who I can be. Now I hide my Chinese and Tibetan linguistic identities that conflict with my Whiteness; I live in the borderlands. This dissertation is about the boundaries that we, the participants and readers, and other people place around our identity possibilities and how we choose to interact with these boundaries.

During this project, I have realized that my interest in sexuality education is purely academic. I have come to realize that I am on the asexual spectrum and tend to perceive and conceptualize aspects of sexuality and sexuality education as external to me. I find podcasts and TV shows about sexuality and sexuality education entertaining because I can see exactly what they are trying to teach us. I look in on sexuality as a voyeur, unfamiliar with any of it, not particularly interested in sharing in it, just

supporting peoples' rights to have consensual sex with the individuals they desire. It took me 31 years to realize that I am asexual because out of all the queer identities, asexuality is one of the most invisible. People talk about and problematize who can have sex with whom and what bodies can express which genders, but very few people remember that some people are not interested in having sex with anyone. The focus on sexuality in the media maintains boundaries around expectations of sexual activity which have served to bind me into a sexual world.

Asexuality can be lonely in its incognito existence and searching for romantic partners who do not see sexual acts as the core of a relationship can be difficult. I have had many deep and intimate friendships with cisgender men that have devolved into scenes bordering on assault, because I want to be their life partner, but not necessarily in physicality the way they offered it to me. Like other queer people, I received very little information on asexuality until finally, I began searching the internet. What little information I did receive was from my mom who explained that some adult siblings who lived and worked in our town were asexual. Asexual people existed for me, but I did not have enough information to know that I was one of them. Sometimes the "A" in LGBTQIA+* is for asexual, but sometimes it stands for allies, and aces are forgotten altogether. At this point, I think I am hetero-romantic, which means that I form romantic bonds with men, but who knows. I am by no means sure and, like many participants in this study, my journey on the road of identity development is ongoing.

This dissertation is in some ways a search for my own identities. I am looking from the outside in as a person who is sometimes surprised when she sees her Whiteness in the mirror, who is fairly certain of her cisgender female identity, and who is still

working out what it means to be on the asexual spectrum. It took me years to accept that I would always be an outsider in China and would not be invited into Chinese-American spaces in the US. It took me years to accept my Whiteness and my complicity in many atrocities around the world as a US citizen. I am a person with hidden and conflicting identities that occupy the borderlands, not quite normative. This study has allowed me the time and space to process who I am and how I experience the world. As such, I cannot hide my voice in this study, and instead, I have chosen to place my own story within each findings chapter alongside the stories of other participants.

I see this dissertation research as both an international development education study and comparative education study. I see it as a study of international development education because the US education system, like education systems around the world, is still deeply in need of reform or, even better, transformation. Among the many aspects of our education system that would benefit from change, I see the potential for transformation through real diversity, equity, and inclusion work that expands the number of available identity possibilities for young people. I see this as a comparative education study in two ways. First, this study is comparative in its analysis of young peoples' experiences in public, private, or homeschool spaces. Second, this study is comparative in its approach to young people's experiences expressing a variety of gender, racial, and sexual identities at home, at school, and on social media.

Key Terms and Concepts

In this section, I introduce how I use specific terms around race, gender, and sexuality. Some of these key terms I have selected or adapted specifically for this study: boundaries, borderlands, and identity possibilities. I also engage with two sets of

interrelated concepts that commonly appear in both critical and post-structuralist scholarship concerning youth, sexuality, and schooling: official and hidden curricula and gender and sexual identities. I approach these concepts from a stance that is predominantly critical, with inspiration from post-structuralism by acknowledging the role of dominant discourses in shaping young people's understandings of themselves, while also acknowledging factors beyond discourse and simultaneously emphasizing youth agency and resistance to these discourses.

Boundaries and Borderlands

Anzaldúa (2012) explains the notion of borderlands in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. From her perspective, borderlands are in-between spaces outside of demarcated boundaries. Borderlands are found at the intersections of power structures, where someone's identities lie outside of normative identity possibilities.

Anzaldúa (2012) explains this in terms of being Chicana, female, indigenous, and lesbian, each identity with its boundaries and their intersection belonging to none of them, thus placing her in the borderlands. She uses Chicano Spanish as another example, a mix of Spanish and English that is criticized by Spanish speakers and English speakers as being outside of the boundaries of both languages, but that is representative of herself and other Chicano Spanish speakers (Anzaldúa, 2012).

While I see the notions of borderlands and boundaries in the experiences of most participants in this study, Joseph Levitt, a Vietnamese American adult, explains his experiences most clearly. He describes how Asian people in his high school “start to put up these boundaries and barriers” around what it meant to be Asian and he had to “decide which boundaries you're part of, which ones you want to knock down, and which ones

are worth knocking down.” Joseph Levitt describes the in-between spaces of identifying as both Vietnamese and American and deciding to construct his own version of masculinity.

To clarify these terms for myself, I use an analogy of boundaries and borderlands as parts of an airport. The edge of the boundary is the identification check station at the entrance to a security checkpoint where you present your ID to the TSA agent. The TSA may reject your ID and send you back at this point. Then you begin the uncomfortable journey across the boundary and into the borderlands, taking off all extraneous clothing, unpacking your bags slightly, and putting everything through a close inspection. You are unpacking the values that were instilled upon you by family, friends, religion, yourself, or society. The TSA may take some of your possessions, the ones that are not allowed past the boundary. You carry only what you need into the borderlands - the transitional space of the airport departures area, a space of discomfort, anticipation, anonymity, and sometimes the only place to be yourself.

Gender and Gender Identity

According to Miller (2019), a scholar focused on gender equity, gender is “the social construction of roles, behaviors, and attributes considered by the general public to be socially ‘appropriate’ for one’s sex as assigned at birth” (p. 11). From Miller’s (2019) perspective, gender is predetermined by society and is superimposed on people based on their assigned sex. Furthermore, according to Butler (1990), language itself imposes limitations on gender possibilities, which in turn constitute a set of imaginable genders. This leads to a separation of ‘intelligible’ genders, which maintain continuity and coherence across sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire, and gender discontinuities,

which deviate from recognized gender possibilities through a separation of sex, gender, sexual practice, or desire (Butler, 1990). For instance, a person with male genitalia is assigned by society as a male and consequently they perform masculinity and seek out female sexual partners. Only this gender possibility is socially ‘intelligible’ for a person with a male body due to limitations placed on people based on compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 1990).

While I am engaging with gender as a social construct with limited gender possibilities and expectations of how those genders should be performed, I see gender identity as the space in which people can transgress the intelligible boundaries of gender. To put it simply, Miller (2019) defines gender identity as “how an individual feels about themselves, intuitively, and then writes themselves into the world” (p. 12). Gender identity is manifested through gender expression, or “physical manifestation of one’s gender identity through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine” (Miller, 2019, p. 11). Both Miller (2019) and Butler (1990; 1993) discuss the performative nature of gender identity through various forms of expression and the possibilities of and structural limitations placed on expressing different gender identities that deviate from those defined as coherent with anatomical sex. In this paper, I will use the term gender identity to describe both how a person identifies themselves and how they perform their genders. When I refer to gender identity, I am referring to masculine, feminine, genderqueer, (a)gender, and all other gendered possibilities (Miller, 2019). To be inclusive of people of all gender possibilities,

I will use the pronouns they/theirs to describe people unless a person has provided their pronouns.

Identity Possibilities

The phrase “identity possibilities” came to me after reading about gender possibilities and ‘intelligible’ genders in *Gender Trouble*, which I describe above in the gender and gender identity section (Butler, 1990). I have extended this notion of possibilities to include racial, gender, and sexual identities. I see identity possibilities as becoming available or unavailable depending on the boundaries that are maintained by certain people in certain places. For instance, if a person’s parents often make jokes about transgender people, they are indicating that transgender identities are outside of the boundaries of available gender identity possibilities within the household.

The Model Minority Stereotype

The model minority stereotype began to be used in 1966 when newspapers put out articles about the success of Japanese and Chinese Americans. This publicity around strong Asian American family culture and work ethic as key to their attainment of the American Dream was an attempt to silence African Americans during the civil rights movement. The model minority stereotype redirected the causes of poverty away from systemic inequality and on to Black culture. According to Lee (2009), “Thus, as a hegemonic device the model minority stereotype maintains the dominance of Whites in the racial hierarchy by diverting attention away from racial inequalities and by setting standards for how minorities should behave” (p. 7). By holding up Asian Americans as the model minority, White people have positioned them in opposition to other

minoritized groups in the US, emphasizing superficial differences in work ethic, family structure, and relationships to welfare. In this way, White people have attributed social issues to cultural differences within minoritized communities, rather than White supremacy and systemic racism.

The model minority stereotype also homogenizes the many Asian cultures and personal experiences into one large group. While data shows that Japanese, Korean, and Chinese American students have relatively high rates of educational attainment, Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao students tend to experience higher rates of poverty, have less social capital, and have more difficulty learning English in school (Lee, 2009). These realities go unacknowledged due to the assumption that Asian is synonymous with success. Lee (2009) finds that students often respond to the pressures of the model minority stereotype imposed on them by their parents and teachers in one of two ways: self-silencing their struggles to maintain their image as hardworking and successful or actively resisting this stereotype through academic disengagement or activism.

New Media and Social Media

New media is “a media ecology where more traditional media such as books, television, and radio are intersecting with digital media, specifically interactive media and media for social communication” (Itō & Antin, 2010). In other words, it is an umbrella term used to refer to new forms of sharing information and communicating including, but not limited to, text messaging, instant messaging, posting on social media, and writing blogs (Pascoe, 2012). New media has become a site of research investigation due in part to the peer-based learning that takes place in these online spaces (Itō & Antin, 2010).

For this research, I focus on a subset of new media, social media, which includes websites and phone-based apps that offer both spaces for making posts and messaging. According to Itō and Antin (2010), social media is “The set of new media that enable social interaction between participants, often through the sharing of media” (p. 28). Social media includes instant messaging, blogs, social network sites, and video and photo sharing sites (Itō & Antin, 2010). New media, and social media, in particular, is interesting in the ways that US youth engagement with it mirrors social engagement in real life. For instance, social media is used for maintaining friendships, gossiping, negotiating identity, sharing information, and hanging out beyond physical boundaries (Itō & Antin, 2010).

Official and Hidden Curriculum

In this section, I briefly introduce the foundational concepts of hidden and formal curricula and explain how these concepts play out in terms of race, gender, and sexuality in schools. The hidden curriculum was first mentioned by P.W. Jackson in his book *Life in Classrooms*, published in 1968. He described the hidden curriculum in terms of rewarding conformity and punishing lack of conformity. According to Jackson (1968), “the crowds, the praise, and the power that combine to give a distinctive flavor to the classroom life collectively form a hidden curriculum which each student (and teacher) must master if he is to make his way satisfactorily through the school” (pp. 33-34). Snyder (1971) built upon issues around the hidden curriculum and student performance at university. He discusses the hidden curriculum in terms of negotiating unspoken expectations about assignments, academic behaviors, and social behaviors (Snyder, 1971). More recently, scholars, including Apple and King (1983), Martin (1983), and

Giroux (1983), discuss the hidden curriculum in terms of power, ideology, economy, and schooling as a mechanism of social control and socialization of young people. Giroux (1983) builds upon the work of Jackson (1968) and Snyder (1971) to define the hidden curriculum as “those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to young people through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life” (p. 47). Although these scholars offer a range of definitions for hidden curriculum, they align in their emphasis on schooling as a way of socializing young people to accept a certain set of norms that they will continue to follow far beyond the classroom.

While the lessons that educators present to students through the formal curriculum may be informative and interesting to researchers, behaviors, dynamics, and interactions between students and teachers that deviate from the formal curriculum are equally or more informative for my research. The hidden curriculum includes the less direct lessons that educators teach their students through the ways that materials are delivered and the ways that the classroom is managed. The knowledge shared through both the formal and hidden curricula reinforces the dominance of powerful groups over those with less power (Apple & King, 1983). As such, subtle actions by educators and students may convey implicit messages about conformity, the social value of young people, and disparities in expectations for young people based on gender, race, and class (Bettie, 2014; Fields, 2008; Lee, 2009). This may be due to a teacher’s discomfort with the subject or as Kendall (2012) explained, it may be due to policy guidelines set out by the school board that restrict the content teachers may discuss. For instance, in the case of a student making a homophobic comment, a teacher could use the comment to spur discussion

about equity for people of all gender identities and sexual orientations. However, if the teacher avoided addressing homophobic or heteronormative comments, they would, in effect, be contributing to the continued normalization of hegemonic masculinity in the classroom and, potentially, in greater society.

Martin (1983) mentions that lessons learned from hidden curricula, such as the emphasis on sex as an acceptable behavior only within a heterosexual marriage, may not always be desired by the recipient. One way of addressing the impact of hidden curricula is through raising students' consciousness, or helping young people to recognize hidden curricula, what practices are responsible for it, how it may affect one's life, and how to avoid undesired learning outcomes (Martin, 1983). Young people may resist and choose whether to acquire information or certain ways of thinking and learning developed through hidden curriculum if they are critically conscious of these lessons (Martin, 1983).

Hidden and formal curricula are foundational to how I understand the ways that education shapes people as learners and members of society. However, I feel that discussions about these curricula often remain centered on teachers and their effects on students without taking into consideration the ways that young people teach each other lessons about racial, gender, and sexual identities. In this dissertation, I include both lessons from educators and classmates within the hidden curricula of schooling.

Queer

Queer is a term that has been used for some time and has taken derogatory, neutral, and expansive forms over time. Butler (1993) problematizes the word queer as follows:

As expansive as the term ‘queer’ is meant to be, it is used in ways that enforce a set of overlapping divisions; in some contexts, the term appeals to a younger generation who want to resist the more institutionalized and reformist politics signified by ‘lesbian and gay’; in some contexts, sometimes the same, it has marked a predominantly White movement that has not fully addressed the way in which ‘queer’ plays – or fails to play – within non-White communities; and whereas in some instances it has mobilized a lesbian activism, in others the term represents a false unity of women and men. (Butler, 1993, p. 228)

However, more contemporary scholars such as Mayo (2017) define queer as an umbrella term that challenges traditional understandings of sexuality by avoiding traditional categorization and language. Miller (2019) defines queer as “an umbrella term that many prefer, both because of convenience...and because it does not force the person who uses it to choose a more specific label for drawing on historical definitions of gender identity or sexual orientation” (Miller, 2019, p. 13). Referring to queer scholars of color, Collins & Bilge (2020) state “the term ‘queer’ unsettles the very idea of normal behavior – ‘queer’ hence becomes a set of actions, a verb, not something one is or has” (p. 41). As such, the word queer offers the freedom to move between or beyond existing identity categories rather than forcing people to define themselves at the expense of foreclosing other possibilities. To avoid reinforcing heteronormativity and binaries that emerge in defining gender and sexual identities, I will use the word queer throughout this paper.

Race and Racial Identity

Race is a social construct that impacts people’s everyday lives, interactions, and perceptions of self and others (J. L. Jackson, 2001). According to Jackson (2001), race

can be seen as biological in terms of melanin, sociological concerning discrimination, and performative in terms of being based on actions and behaviors. While race appears to be predominantly external, racial identity draws together external factors with lived experiences. As some participants in this dissertation have explained, racial identity can be assigned to people based on their skin tone but is also constructed from their lived experiences and understandings of race. For instance, Todd discussed identifying as Taiwanese American but not considering himself as a person of color until moving to a location in which he was minoritized. Therefore, Todd's racial identity shifted based on his experiences with discrimination.

Bettie (2014) and Lee (2009) studied the ways that Latin@ and Asian American students, respectively, broke into smaller sub-groups and construct their racial identities as group members and individuals. Students chose their groups based on several factors, including their families' countries of origin, their gender and sexual identities, their economic classes, and their desired levels of educational attainment. By studying racial identities, Bettie (2014) and Lee (2009) were able to better address the complex dynamics between racial identity development and other aspects of a person's identity.

Sexual Identity

Marwick (2013) defines sexuality as "an individual expression and understanding of desire" (p. 64). Similarly, Mayo (2017) explains that sexuality or sexual orientation refers to the romantic and sexual attractions and desires a person feels. For ease of reading, I have chosen to use the word sexual identity here to maintain a clear pattern of gender identity and expression, sexual identity and expression, and racial identity and expression. Examples of sexual identity include same-sex attractions; heterosexuality;

bisexuality, or an attraction to both males and females; and pansexuality, or an attraction to people of many gender identities, such as transgender. For this paper, I will be using the term queer to discuss people with expansive sexual identities or gender identities as I discussed previously.

Young People

There are many words used to describe and classify young people – children, youth, minors, adolescents. These four terms are considered to be socially constructed to “delineate normative age-based or developmental-based parameters of belonging” (Prior, 2013, p. 228). According to Hagerman (2017), children are defined as being under the age of 12. In terms of identities, young people are not seen as developing identities until they are adolescents (Prior, 2013). As this research is focused on identity development and the majority of participants in this study are above the age of 12, the word “children” does not properly describe them. Youth is a term that connotes the agency of young people and is often used to describe people between 15 and 24 (Best, 2007; Prior, 2013). Youth is often demarcated by social and physical milestones such as passing through puberty, living in a shared family home, or not yet being married (DeJaeghere et al., 2016). As my participants are within a wider age range, some above the age of 30, and their recollections span from childhood into adulthood, I have chosen to use the word “young people” to refer to participants without limiting them to boundaries drawn by the socially constructed words such as “child” or “youth”.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study consists of two parts, my approach to intersectional analysis and my approach to youth that I engaged with in this study. First, I

explain how I approach intersectionality as an analytical framework. Then, I explain how I currently understand the roles of boundaries and agency in identity expressions among young people.

Intersectionality

According to Collins (2019) and Collins and Bilge (2020), there are six core constructs of intersectionality which I will attempt to integrate into my analysis of data. These include social inequality, social justice, social context, power, relationality, and complexity. At its foundation, intersectionality looks at social inequalities and resulting

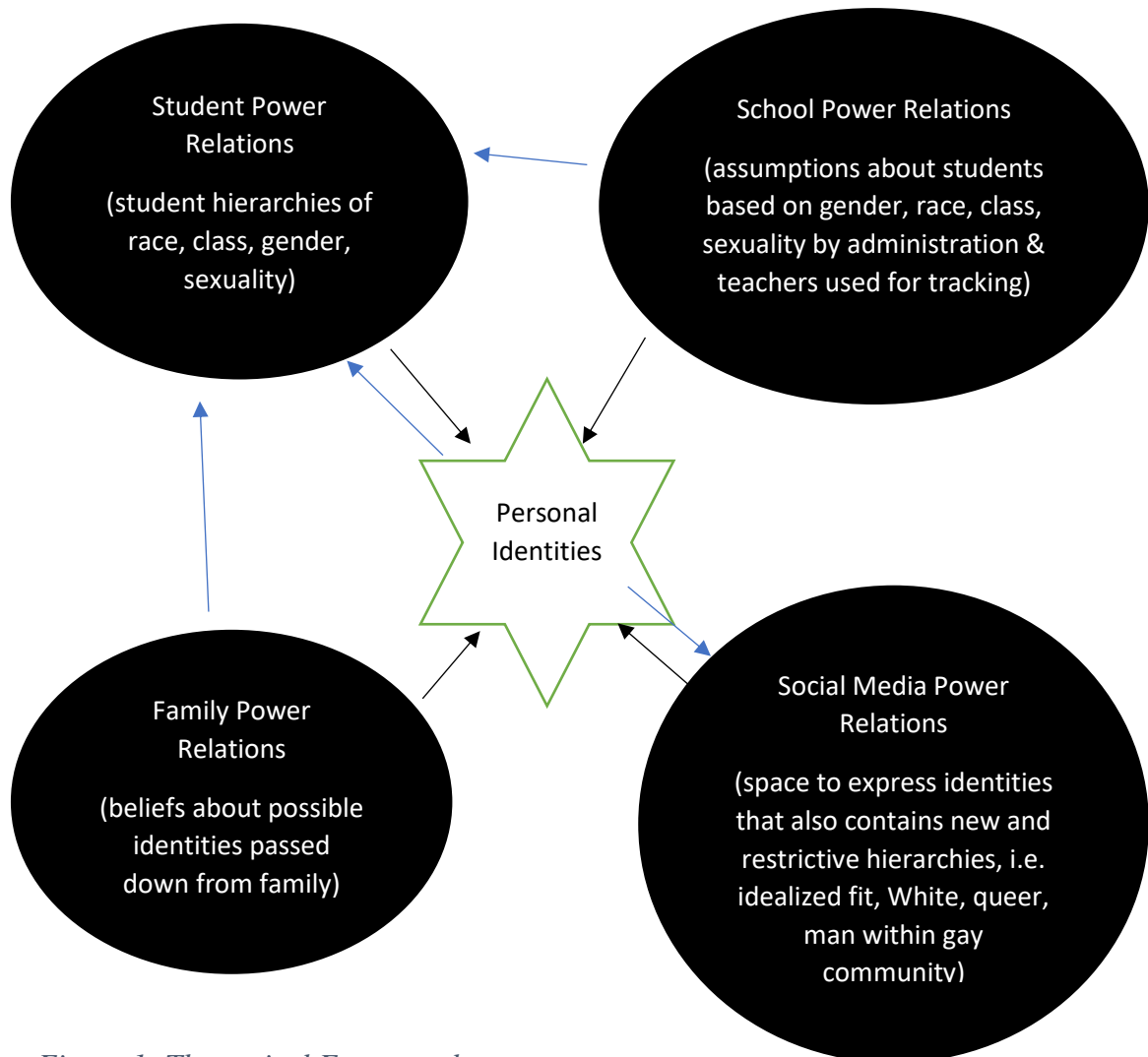


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

social problems that arise from intersecting power relations (Collins , 2019). To do so, it is important to understand the layers of context – global, national, local, historical – that determine where people are situated in relation to intersecting power relations (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020). Intersecting power relations produce social inequalities connected to race, gender, and other identities (Collins, 2019). In this study, power relations include student hierarchies, assumptions made by teachers and administration about students based on their races, gender, sexualities, or classes, family beliefs about possible identities, and boundaries around identity expressions in online communities as illustrated in Figure 1. The arrows in this figure show the ways in which power relations interact with each other and influence personal identities. The arrows pointing outward from personal identities mark areas in which young people often express agency or boundary maintenance behaviors in response to classmates’ behaviors, assumptions made by educators, lessons about possible identities passed down by family members, or messages from social media.

From an intersectional perspective, power relations do not form in isolation, but rather through mutual influence. For instance, heterosexism and racism build upon each other, rather than developing separately (Collins & Bilge, 2020). “Intersecting power relations produce social divisions of race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, country of origin, and citizenship status that are unlikely to be adequately understood in isolation from one another” (Collins, 2019, p. 45). As such, intersectional power relations should be approached through relationality. Relationality focuses analysis on connections between categories or systems of power rather than trying to parse out which parts of phenomena exist in one category or the other (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020).

Using a relational approach, I present and analyze the complex dynamics of power at the intersections of gender identities, sexual identities, and race. To conduct deep intersectional analysis, one must have a deep understanding of other critical fields such as antiracism, decolonization, feminism, or critical race theory (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020). For this dissertation, I am engaging primarily with post-structuralist feminist gender theories and critical youth studies in my intersectional analysis. I hope to use the processes and findings of this dissertation to inform future school policies and practices to make them more welcoming for young people of all identities.

Young People, Boundaries, and Agency

Critical youth studies of gender, sexuality, and race along with poststructuralist perspectives on youth, subjectivities, and education and intersectional work embracing aspects of both take up a conversation of structure and agency or resistance. In this paper, I engage primarily with the critical youth studies perspectives of structure, or boundaries, and agency. As previously mentioned, the field of critical youth studies often emphasizes “adultist” policies as boundaries that limit otherwise agentic youth (Best, 2007; Clark & Richards, 2017; Fields, 2008; Ibrahim & Steinberg, 2014; Leonard, 2007; O’Loughlin & Van Zile, 2014).

Boundaries. Scholars who engage with critical youth studies often discuss the limitations that adults, and the boundaries that they maintain, place on youth (Best, 2007; Clark & Richards, 2017; Fields, 2008; Ibrahim & Steinberg, 2014; Leonard, 2007). Concerning gender identities and sexual orientations specifically, I agree with Prior (2013), who asserts in her research about young people and masculinities in schools, that

“youth are often limited by external restraints – legal, social, familial – that constrict their ability to freely express themselves, or to have spaces to engage in conversations about contested issues such as gender and sexuality” (p. 227). According to Prior (2013), these restraints have been put in place as a result of adults’ discomfort about youth sexuality that have perpetuated an idea that sex is shameful until adulthood. Bettie's (2014) work reveals how adults extend these constraints to working-class students, students of color, and student mothers by first perpetuating discourse around their failures to conform to White, middle-class, heterosexual norms and then tracking them into vocational courses that fail to prepare them for college, thus impacting the trajectories of their lives.

While I see structures of power as extending beyond language and discourse and into areas such as educators’ varying responses to students expressing different identities I do find poststructuralism helpful for understanding how boundaries are enacted and how classmates’, parents’, and educators’ boundary maintenance behaviors can impact peoples’ understandings of themselves. According to Weedon (1997), poststructuralism is “a way of conceptualizing the relationship between language, social institutions and individual consciousness which focuses on how power is exercised and on the possibilities of change” (Weedon, 1997, p. 19). Central to poststructuralism is the way that language is used, often by those in power, to constitute individuals’ understandings of themselves – their subjectivities. For instance, if a teacher begins their class with a phrase such as “Good morning boys and girls,” they are establishing a space in which only male and female gender identities are recognized and considered normal. The use of phrases such as “poor White trash” by teachers and students, as discussed in Bettie's (2014) research, also serves to shape expectations of White people as middle-class,

people of color as working-class, and poor White people as failing to fit either classist or racist expectation. However, I find that several important factors are missing from the notion that discourse works solely by itself to constitute gender, sexual, or racial identities in schools. These factors include but are not limited to physical cues, organization of space, and school policies and practices, which I identify as part of the hidden curriculum. In terms of my research, I assert that while discourse is a major force in shaping subjectivities at school, and in particular, racial, gender, and sexual identities, there are additional impactful forces that extend beyond rhetoric.

Agency. I approach this study from the perspective that young people produce culture, actively construct their social worlds, and can be agentic subjects who engage with and resist the identity possibilities superimposed on them by adults (O’Loughlin & Van Zile, 2014; Prior, 2013). While adults may limit the options available to young people, these young people can develop the consciousness of systems of language and power that limit the directions of their growth, such as unofficial sexuality education or classist discourse. After becoming conscious, young people can resist these structures (O’Loughlin & Van Zile, 2014). According to Giroux (1983), schools are places where “different social groups both accept and reject the complex mediations of culture, knowledge, and power that give form and meaning to the process of schooling” (p. 62). In other words, young people exercise their agency by choosing to accept, reject, or change messages embedded in school policies and practices. As previously mentioned, young people may need support in growing their critical consciousness of the impacts that these policies and practices have on their subjectivities and identities (Martin, 1983). I approach both student and adult research participants in this study with the belief that,

despite the limitations that the school system and educators may knowingly or unknowingly place on young people through official and hidden curricula, young people may find methods of resistance that allow them to grow in unforeseen directions.

I take a critical perspective of youth as agentic and capable of both speaking for themselves and of making their own educated decisions albeit within the constraints of preexisting spaces. However, I also take the perspective that lesson content and classroom dynamics form both official and hidden curricula, and often perpetuate the power of heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, and Whiteness. While youth are agentic, these lessons, policies, and practices may still be shaping their gender and sexual identities in both recognized and unrecognized ways. Therefore, by combining these two perspectives, I view youth as both shaped by their school, home, and media environments and agentic in their selection of which boundaries enacted by people in these environments to accept or reject. Throughout this study, I see agency in two forms – outward expressions of identities beyond boundaries and more subtle pushing against these boundaries through self-reflection and experimentation.

Methodological Approach

My methodological approach to this study is closely tied to my theoretical framework. As the focus of my research continued to shift throughout data collection due to COVID 19 and difficulties with the ethical review committee, my methodological approaches to the school research and adult research differ slightly. In addition, throughout the writing process, it became apparent that I could not analyze and represent the experiences of participants without including my own story. In this section, I first

provide a brief introduction to my methodological approaches for young people and adults. Then, I explain the role of my own data and story in the dissertation.

Methodological Approaches for Young People and Adults

When selecting my methodological approaches, I initially conceptualized this study from a critical youth studies perspective. Best (2007) highlights four main characteristics of critical youth studies. The first is a consideration of power dynamics between the researcher and participants. Second, researchers must recognize the power they hold in the ways they can shape young peoples' understandings of their own experiences. Third, researchers should want and plan to conduct empowering research with young people that will lead to improvements in their lives. Finally, researchers should maintain a commitment to self-reflexivity.

Reflecting on these four characteristics of critical youth research, I chose to carry out a photo-voice activity and a social media diary in addition to more general interviews on health education. I structured the study so that student participants analyzed their own photographs and their media use through interviews, rather than conducting the initial analysis of myself. In this way, I hoped to highlight participants' voices rather than my own analysis. These methods, however, did not result in the rich data that I was expecting, which I elaborate on more in Chapter 3.

I incorporated adults into this study in September 2020 after the murder of George Floyd and my involvement in mutual aid work led me to shift my focus away from sexuality education and towards the development of racial, gender, and sexual identities. I approached the adult research from a theoretical perspective that people develop their identities while navigating a web of intersecting power relations within families, schools,

and social media that result in boundaries around gender, sexual, and racial identity possibilities. As such, in-depth life story interviews, which are often connected to research for social change, were an appropriate data collection method for this type of research (McLeod & Thomson, 2009). In addition, life story interviews produced rich data conducive for intersectional analysis.

Role of Self in this Study

I initially intended to sequester my personal experiences to a positionality section in the introduction of this dissertation, focusing completely on the experiences of participants throughout the findings chapters. However, while analyzing the data and writing each findings chapter for this dissertation, it became clear to me that my understanding of each participants' experiences was based on my own positionality. I could not write about participants without writing about myself and how my perspectives and experiences impacted my perceptions of their stories. In addition, as I began writing myself into this dissertation, I learned more and more about my own experiences developing and expressing my current identities. As a result, this dissertation is now autobiographical, both to inform readers of how I conceptualized each findings chapter and to document my process of self-discovery through thinking about participants' experiences.

Significance of the Study

#MeToo, #Blacklivesmatter, and #blacktranslivesmatter signify that sexism, misogyny, racism, and transphobia are deeply embedded in US culture. As discussed previously, these enactments of intersecting power relations are likely to find their roots in discourse at home, on social media, and at school. I believe that by learning about

conversations around race, gender, and sexuality at school, at home, and on social media we may be able to address resulting social inequities more effectively. However, researchers in the US have rarely broached the subjects of how young people experience race, gender, and sexuality at schools in the US. Bettie (2014), Lee (2009), and Ramirez et al. (2016) are among the few scholars who have offered intersectional analyses of race, gender, sexuality, and class in US settings.

Additionally, while studies have focused on young peoples' expressions of identities either at school (Pascoe, 2007) or on social media (Van Oosten et al., 2017), few studies have included both school and social media. Looking at both social worlds simultaneously through this research, we can better understand young person experiences with official and hidden curricula around identities in formal and informal learning spaces at school and online. In addition, by including both the experiences of current junior-high/high school students and retrospective experiences of adults who have completed their education, we may better understand how school experiences impact identity development across time.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter three, mainly arise from structures that adults establish to protect youth (Leonard, 2007; Prior, 2013). The research in schools was able to capture voices of young people to the extent that parents signing consent forms, adults working in schools, and university employees reviewing my ethical review board allowed. This study was originally intended to focus on gender identities and sexual orientations, but the superintendent of DRCS D suggested that I reframe it as an anti-bullying study for the school board. While this changed the

shape of my project, I see racial identities as equally important and therefore am glad to have made that change.

In terms of constraints on the data collection, I had originally planned on conducting observations of the cafeteria, hallways, and a classroom, ethical review board required parental consent for all students who moved through those spaces, making it impossible for me to conduct observations of students. Both the new framing and shifting of data collection methods impacted how I worked with students in the first part of data collection, leaving me with many suggestions for future projects, which I will describe in more detail in the Methods section and at the end of this dissertation.

COVID 19 also impacted this study in multiple ways. First, it left me with only three weeks to collect data in DRCSD between approval from the ethical review committee and the closing of schools in New York State on March 15, 2020. Second, due to COVID 19, I was unable to enter my second school to complete my original comparative case study. It was at this point that I chose to pursue life story interviews with adults. Fortunately, these life story interviews ended up being the most informative and fruitful source of data for this dissertation.

Structure of the Paper

This dissertation tells the stories of ten people who push against or transgress boundaries around gender, sexual, and racial identity possibilities. It is organized in eight chapters. This first chapter introduces the theoretical framework of intersectionality and critical youth studies that provides the foundation for my understanding of how power structures at home, school, and on social media platforms create and maintain boundaries around gender, sexual, and racial identity possibilities for young people. The second

chapter introduces relevant literature in the areas of intersectionality and critical post-structuralist feminist theory that is central to my theoretical framework and analytical approach. The third chapter presents my approach to this study and methods, based on critical youth studies and life story research, used in this study. Chapter four discusses the experiences of three bisexual, White women who face boundaries around their sexual identities from their parents, classmates, and teachers and push against these boundaries through alternative expressions of femininity. Chapter five looks at the experiences of two cis-gender Asian men, one of whom is queer and the other straight. This chapter focuses on the boundaries around masculinity and Asianness maintained by the men's families and classmates and how they push against or transgress these boundaries. Chapter six explores the experiences of a Black, pansexual, agender individual and a transgender, lesbian woman who began to express their gender and sexual identities in college after recognizing and transgressing boundaries around identity possibilities maintained by classmates. Chapter seven, the last findings chapter, addresses the experiences of two White, cis-gender, straight individuals who grew up in religious families. This chapter focuses primarily on learning difference through exposure and pushing against boundaries around gender identities maintained through religious doctrine at home and at school. Chapter eight draws together the central themes around boundaries and agency in the forms of shifts in identity expression or pushing against boundaries and connects these themes back to existing literature on schooling and young people's experiences with gender, sexual, and racial identities.

Chapter 2: Intersections, Boundaries, and Borderlands

To survive the Borderlands

You must live *sin fronteras*

Be a crossroads

- Gloria Anzaldua (p.217)

In this chapter, I focus on three areas of literature important for understanding my research on how young people engage with identity possibilities as they construct their identities. First, I explain intersectional analysis, including sub-areas of relationality and borderlands, which serves as the basis for both my analysis and the idea of boundaries. Then, I discuss research on gender identities at school using critical post-structuralist feminist gender theories, which have deeply impacted my theoretical understanding of identity possibilities and boundaries. Finally, I engage with conceptualizations of young people and agency from the perspectives of critical post-structuralist feminist gender theories and critical youth studies. Within these larger sections, I will discuss literature that addresses young people's identities and intersectionality at school and on social media in order to contextualize my own research within these bodies of literature.

Intersectional Analysis

Intersectionality originated from the political work of women of color in the 1970s when it was used to theorize how intersections of power impacted women of color's lives (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020). For instance, Audre Lorde (2012) wrote about being a Black lesbian woman scholar and how the feminist movement, Black women, and Black people, in general, failed to work together against racism and sexism

as a result of these intersecting power relations. While Crenshaw is known for coining the term “intersectionality” in her works from 1989 and 1991, she mainly gave a name to an idea that had been central to the scholarly work and experiences of women of color who were marginalized both by the feminist movement and the antiracist movement (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020; Crenshaw, 1995). According to Collins (2019) “For Crenshaw, naming intersectionality aimed not to seek some higher theoretical truth but rather to address how the specific social problem of violence affected people of color, women, and immigrant groups” (p.124). In other words, Crenshaw’s work was a continuation of the political work that women of color had been doing since the 1970s and a bridging of this work to academia (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Intersectionality is also a theoretical tool for both analysis and praxis (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020).

In an effort toward developing intersectionality as a critical social theory, Collins (2019) has laid out six core constructs, four guiding premises, and three dimensions of critical thinking for intersectional analysis. My understanding of the relationship between these constructs, premises, and dimensions is presented visually in Figure 2, which synthesizes several visuals and quotations from Collins (2019) into the layers of intersectionality.

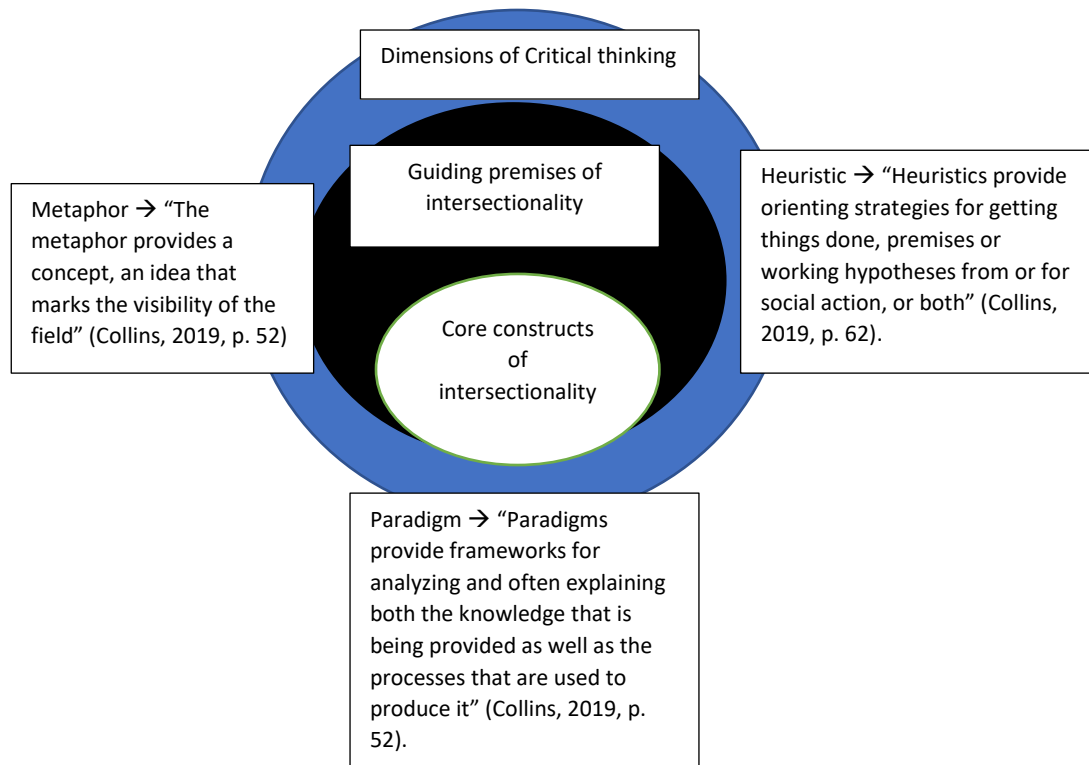


Figure 2. Collins' Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory

The six core constructs, which are described in-depth in chapter 1, include relationality, power, social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020). The first of the guiding premises is that systems of power such as race, class, and gender mutually construct each other, which can be referred to as relationality through co-formation (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020). In the US, wealthy White men hold the most power in a social and governmental system that was historically created by and for them, and they, therefore have the most privilege. Second, intersecting power relations produce social inequalities (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020). Racial, gendered, and economic inequalities arise from this system that prioritizes wealthy, White men and allows them to grow wealthy while poor people of color who have experienced systemic racism for generations live in poverty. Third, the social location of people within intersecting power relations shapes their experiences and

perspectives of the social world (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020). For instance, as a White woman, I continue to actively learn about red lining, medical experimentation, the history of tipping, and other actions taken by White people to marginalize Black people, because this history was not previously embedded in my perspectives of society. Fourth, intersectional analysis is necessary for solving social problems within a given context (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020). The marginalization of people based on racial, gender, and sexual identities cannot be addressed separately, because these identities and the power structures that lead to marginalization are complex and intertwined. Rather, we must conduct intersectional analysis to find the root causes of boundary maintenance behaviors that limit the identity possibilities available to young people.

The final layer of intersectionality as a critical theory is the critical thinking aspect – the metaphor, the paradigm, and the heuristic (Collins, 2019). The metaphor is a concept that illustrates an issue in the field (Collins, 2019). For instance, Collins (2019) sees Anzaldúa's (2012) borderlands, which are discussed below, as a metaphor for relationality. The paradigms “provide frameworks for analyzing and often explaining both the knowledge that is being provided as well as the processes that are used to produce it” (Collins, 2019, p. 52). Finally, the heuristic provides strategies for action, whether that be forming hypotheses from social action or preparing to take social action (Collins, 2019). Intersectionality as a critical social theory is centered on both understanding social structures of power and working to address the social inequalities they cause (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020).

In this study, I engage primarily with the core construct of relationality through co-formation and the guiding premise that the social location of people shapes their

experiences and perspectives. I engage with borderlands as both a metaphor and a paradigm, which explains the complex ways in which identities collide, combine, and interact with intersecting power relations.

Relationality and Borderlands

Relationality is one of the six core constructs of intersectional analysis put forward by Collins (2019). It shifts focus away from analyzing categories, such as gender, race, or sexual orientation, and toward analyzing the interconnections and relationships between these categories. Collins (2019) looks closely at the analytical possibilities of relationality through co-formation, meaning that categories such as gender, race, and sexual orientation and the power structures that maintain hierarchies across these categories form in relationship rather than forming in separate bubbles. “Inspiring scholars and activists alike, intersectionality’s conception of relationality replaces notions of oppositional difference (either/or thinking) with notions of relational difference (both/and thinking) and has generated new questions and avenues of investigation” (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p. 232). In the context of this dissertation, I see relationality as a way of looking at a whole person with interplaying and sometimes conflicting identities, rather than breaking a person’s identities into categorical parts.

Anzaldúa's (2012) borderlands is one form of intersectional analysis that addresses relationality through co-formation (Collins, 2019). According to Collins (2019), “By pointing out how movement across spatial and symbolic borders is rarely smooth, and how borders themselves are always contested in some way, Anzaldúa’s borderland space resembles intersectionality’s impetus toward co-formation” (p. 245). Anzaldúa (2012) uses the metaphor of borderlands to explain how intersectional

identities are not a set of binary categories to be analyzed independently, but are, instead, a crossroads of colliding, overlapping, co-forming, and blending identities. While this proves difficult to do in a dissertation format, I have attempted to engage with borderlands in my intersectional analysis of participants' interactions with identity possibilities and their identity formation.

Anzaldúa (2012) begins her book by explaining the borderlands in terms of the border between Mexico and the US that people attempt to cross every day. "Living in a no-man's-borderland, caught between being treated as criminals and being able to eat, between resistance and deportation, the illegal refugees are some of the poorest and the most exploited of any people in the US" (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 34). Concerning the literal borderland, she focuses on the intersecting power relations that marginalize undocumented women in the US – the threat of sexual violence, exploitation, and lack of social safety net both in the US and in Mexico. As for the metaphorical borderlands, Anzaldúa (2012) focuses on her Chicana, female, indigenous, queer identities and how these identities both unify and collide. Like Lorde (2012) describes concerning Black men and Black women, Anzaldúa (2012) observes the destructive ways that Chicano masculinity -which is built upon experiences of inferiority in comparison to Latin@, Mexican, White, and Indigenous men - marginalizes the Indigenous, Black and feminine aspects of Chicana women and *mestiza* culture. She sees queer people as the unifiers of all spaces, pulling queer people together across time and space to advocate for liberation.

Being the supreme crossers of cultures, homosexuals have strong bonds with the queer White, Black, Asian, Native American, Latino, and with the queer in Italy, Australia and the rest of the planet. We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods. Our role is to link people with each other – the Blacks with Jews with Indians with Asians with Whites with extraterrestrials. It is to transfer ideas

and information from one culture to another. Colored homosexuals have more knowledge of other cultures; have always been at the forefront (although sometimes in the closet) of all liberation struggles in this country; have suffered more injustices and have survived them despite all odds. Chicanos need to acknowledge the political and artistic contributions of their queer. (Anzaldúa, 2012, pp. 106–107)

In her writing, Anzaldúa (2012) rarely, if ever, focuses on one aspect of identity, but is constantly focusing on their intersections, collisions, and unifying aspects, illustrating the borderlands as relationality through co-formation.

I see many parallels between the works of Anzaldúa (2012) and Lorde (2012), who focuses on the experiences of Black, lesbian, women in the US. Lorde (2012) describes how Black men exert power over Black women fighting for female liberation by labeling them as lesbian, thus weakening the possibilities for Black people to coalesce and fight against racial oppression and for Black women to join women's liberation movements. Simultaneously, Lorde (2012) sees many feminist movements as fighting for White female liberation, while othering women of color and lesbian women. Her intersectional perspectives illustrate the relational dynamics between race, gender, and sexuality and the power structures that empower and marginalize people based on their identities. Both Anzaldúa (2012) and Lorde (2012) use their own lived experiences to speak to the ways that power structures place boundaries around identity possibilities for queer, feminist, women of color and what happens when these boundaries are transgressed. Drawing on this literature, my intention in this study is to present how young people interpret the power structures that impact their identity possibilities and how they navigate the boundaries enacted by power.

Intersectionality at School

Few scholars have engaged with intersectional analysis while researching identity development in schools. In this section, I will discuss how Bettie (2014), Lee (2009), and Ramirez et al. (2016) reveal the complexity and relationality inherent in the ways that students in the US express their identities and maintain boundaries around identity possibilities. In addition, I will discuss how Bettie (2014), Lee (2009), and Ramirez et al. (2016) look beyond the individual students to the power structures underlying the ways that their teachers, classmates, families, and communities maintain boundaries around possible identities. Their works make the strengths and difficulties of intersectional analysis apparent to me.

Lee (2009) conducted an ethnographic study in a school in the US to look more closely at how the model minority stereotype and racial dynamics around it played out in classrooms. Lee (2009) found that White teachers and students saw academically strong Asian students as the norm and weaker Asian students as aberrant. White teachers tended to view the Korean Student Association and Asian Student Association as celebrations of culture, while they viewed the Black Student Union and gospel choir as separatist, revealing racially biased perspectives against Black students (Lee, 2009). Among White students from lower socio-economic backgrounds along with Black students, Asian students were seen as succeeding at their expense, leading to racial tensions (Lee, 2009). Conversely, Asian American students who worked to fulfill the model minority stereotype were often taught by their parents that they were superior to Black students and thus developed negative racist perspectives against them (Lee, 2009). These dynamics between White teachers and students, Black students, and Asian students are

representative of how the model minority stereotype is perpetuated in general society and impacts relationships between people of color (Lee, 2009).

Parents played a large role in shaping how Korean-identified and Asian-identified students performed their racial and ethnic identities, enacting versions of the model minority stereotype to gain respect from White people while maintaining boundaries around other possible ways of being Asian (Lee, 2009). However, Asian American-identified students and New Wave students, generally children of Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian refugees, broke out of these patterns, albeit in very different ways. New Wave students formed their collective identity as poor academic performers who often skipped class to smoke and chat on the lawn in reaction to negative experiences and academic competition at school (Lee, 2009). Rather than playing into the stereotype of the nerdy Asian student, the male New Wave students differentiated themselves by presenting as sexually superior and tough, while girls resisted the image of the good girl by wearing more makeup and revealing clothes (Lee, 2009). This analysis shows relationality through looking at how gender mediated racial identity performances.

In contrast, Asian American-identified students broke the model minority stereotype by becoming politically active. They found adult role models in Asian Americans United (AAU) who encouraged them to view the Asian American experience from an intersectional lens and argued that racism and sexism should be confronted directly. In reaction, Korean-identified, Asian-identified, and New Wave male students maintained boundaries around gender and racial expressions of Asian American-identified female students in ways similar to how Audre Lorde (2007) described Black men policing activist Black women, by saying that they were too American, un-Asian, or

lesbian in attempts to force them back within recognizable hetero-patriarchal gender boundaries (Lee, 2009). Despite these intra-racial and gendered dynamics, Asian, New Wave, and Asian American students came together in the Asian Students' Association in response to the racism that they faced at school (Lee, 2009). As such, it is clear that within that particular school, Asian students formed groups that responded to pressures of the model minority stereotype in different ways through gender and sexual expressions, relationships with schooling, and political engagement. By integrating herself into the school community, Lee (2009) was able to learn about the complex racial, ethnic, and gender dynamics among students, illustrating both the limitations placed on young people by adults and youth agency in response to those limitations.

Focusing mainly on the broader dynamics of each group and how individuals in that group maintained boundaries around one another to separate themselves from other groups of Asian students, Lee (2009) provided few examples of identity development within individuals. The examples that she provides indicate complex and dynamic experiences of intersectional identities that pushed individuals in the direction of different groups, which I would have liked to learn more about. As such, I have focused this dissertation on the experiences of individuals to look more closely at how young people interact with and enact identity possibilities.

In a similar vein, Bettie (2014) studied class, race, and gender identities of White and Mexican-American girls in a school on the Mexico-US border. Focusing on class as a hidden identity, Bettie (2014) discusses how class is often hidden behind race, with people of color assumed to be of lower classes, and is often directly associated only with White men among whom class differences are visible. Bettie (2014) uses intersectionality

and relationality through co-formation to theorize that structures of power and associated axes of identity, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, are formed simultaneously, intersecting with class to shape possible class futures (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020). Both the hidden nature of class and its co-constitution with other structures of power makes it difficult to study and make sense of race and ethnicity across one class category or class experiences within the same race or ethnicity (Bettie, 2014). As such, the tracking of both White and Mexican-American working-class students away from college-preparation courses and into the vocational program was attributed to race by students of color, while working-class White students lacked the vocabulary around class to attribute this perpetuation of inequity to classism (Bettie, 2014). As shown by “Las Chicas” who were working-class and showed academic potential, this tracking was based not on academic ability but on teachers’ and counselors’ racist, classist, and gendered assumptions of girls’ futures (Bettie, 2014).

Bettie (2014) conducted her ethnographic research mainly with students who did not conform to middle-class “prep” standards due to differentiated expressions of gender and perspectives towards education. Rather than attempting and failing to conform to cultural standards based on race and ethnicity, class, and sexualities, these girls created new classifications with unique recognition standards. For instance, White “smokers” and Mexican-American “Cholas” from families with unstable employment and housing performed either hyper-femininity or female masculinity to challenge gender expectations. While most girls Bettie (2014) talked with were sexually active, Mexican-American girls were least likely to use birth control, encourage partners to use condoms, or to have abortions, thus having higher rates of pregnancies while in school and

contributing to teachers' and counselors' assumptions about these girls' educational trajectories and futures. Taking into account the fluidity of identity expressions, while class differences were often signaled through gender expression, clothing, and relation to education, both White and Mexican-American girls would shift their expressions to blend in with people of a different class (Bettie, 2014).

In terms of downward mobility, some middle-class White girls performed working-class styles to make friendships with people who faced similar difficulties such as family alcoholism or queerness (Bettie, 2014). A small group of White and Mexican-American working-class students were able to enter the college-preparation track and perform middle-classness through building friendships and cultural capital with team members on sports teams or defining themselves in opposition to delinquent older siblings. Programs like Math, Engineering, and Science Achievement for minority students also provided support for Mexican-American girls to see college preparation as a pathway that did not detract from culture or heritage (Bettie, 2014).

Bettie (2014) looked at both the whole picture of how different groups of girls were tracked based on their racial, gender, and class expressions and also how individuals determined which group to join through an intersectional lens. Structurally, I find Bettie's (2014) frequent use of literature to support her analysis within her findings chapters to detract somewhat from the flow of intersectional analysis as seen in the works of Anzaldúa (2012) and Lorde (2012). I hope that by limiting my use of literature in the findings chapters of this dissertation, I can allow participants to speak more for themselves.

Standing apart from Bettie (2014) and Lee (2009), Ramirez et al. (2016) turned their focus towards two Latin@ high school teachers in a town on the US-Mexico border who engaged their students in critically analyzing their identities using border pedagogy. Border pedagogy, which originated from (Anzaldúa, 2012) borderlands, is often used to engage students with different cultural codes, experiences, and languages to help them construct their hybrid identities (Ramirez et al., 2016). Ramirez et al. (2016) found that both teachers, one Mexican-American and the other an immigrant from Mexico, derive their approaches to recognizing and placing value on bilingual abilities and the struggles of occupying multiple cultural spaces as both Latin@ and “American”.

Both teachers recognized that they navigated two different spaces. One space is considered the norm, where students and teachers must adapt to the environment. This space is assimilationist, in that it seeks to minimize their cultural and linguistic identity. The other space is where youth are able to explore who they are and or want to be in terms of their cultural identity (Ramirez et al., 2016, p. 319)

They assigned class projects that integrated discussions and presentations of multiple identities through writing and mural painting. One teacher actively engaged in student discussions of sexual identities and the intersections between being Latin@, queer, and female to address a space in which some students openly reject queer identities, while others work to build critical consciousness around the marginalization of queer students within the Latin@ community (Ramirez et al., 2016). In the other classroom, Latin@ students isolate Mexican students who travel from Tijuana to attend the school, which has led the teacher from Mexico to guide students in discussions about what it means to integrate into the school community while maintaining identity. Ramirez et al. (2016) found that through these discussions and challenges of biased perspectives, students developed the ability to critically analyze the multiple layers of marginalization including

sexuality, gender, and place of origin, and how these layers impacted their lives. Their work draws attention to the important roles that teachers play in young people's identity development, informing the implications of my dissertation research.

As shown through the work of Ramirez et al. (2016), Lee (2009), and Bettie (2014), identities are located on the intersections of power structures that form the White, middle-class, cis-gender, heteropatriarchal normative framework through which students experience their education. Addressing dynamics between sexualities, Latin@ identities, and Mexican identities, Ramirez et al. (2016) look at border pedagogy as a way to build critical thinking around biases around queerness and cultural expression as well as experiences occupying multiple cultural spaces. Focusing on Asian students, Lee (2009) uses intersectionality to parse out the complex co-formation of power structures that uphold the model minority stereotype and how Asian students navigate these structures. Bettie (2014) studies the educational futures of White and Mexican-American working-class students who form groups based on intersecting class, race, gender, and sexual identities and are tracked according to those groups. Each of these works provides an example of how one can use intersectional analysis to study the many identities of students and the power structures that influence their educational attainment and identity development simultaneously. I hope to contribute further insights into young peoples' engagement with gender, sexual, and racial identity possibilities and boundaries placed around those identities by family members, classmates, educators, and social media messages through this research.

Critical post-structuralist feminist theories of gender and sexuality

Judith Butler's (1990; 1993; 1997) critical post-structuralist feminist theories of subjection, gender, and sexuality inform my understandings of identity possibilities, boundaries, and boundary maintenance. In this section, I briefly explain these theories and discuss literature that looks at gender theory in action.

Subjection, agency, gender, and sexuality

Butler (1997) describes subjection as the process of power to foreclose identity possibilities, thus producing a subject who continues to enact the same power dynamics. Foreclosure is the imagined impossibility of certain identities, which can result in the production of a subject (Butler, 1997). Oppressive forms of power both foreclose identity possibilities, making subject formation possible, and are perpetuated by subjects who enact power dynamics through maintenance of boundaries around identity possibilities (Butler, 1997). In this dissertation, I use the phrases boundary maintenance or maintenance of boundaries to describe the process of foreclosure. O'Loughlin & Van Zile (2014) describe this process of foreclosure in the ways that adults superimpose identities upon their children through guiding them toward "gender appropriate" ways of being. The hidden curriculum at schools is also used to support the dominance of powerful groups while foreclosing certain identity possibilities (Apple & King, 1983).

Despite the boundaries placed around children's identity possibilities, all of these examples of foreclosures are accompanied by a discussion of agency. Butler (1997) defines agency as "the assumption of a purpose *unintended* by power, one that could not have been derived logically or historically, that operates in a relation of contingency and reversal to the power that makes it possible, to which it nevertheless belongs" (p. 15). In

other words, from Butler's perspective, agency arises from, belongs to, and works against oppressive systems of power. For instance, while schooling continues to enact hidden curricula, students can become conscious of and push against hidden curricula that maintain boundaries around their identity possibilities in school (Martin, 1983).

Butler (1990) uses post-structuralism to theorize about gender identity possibilities and the boundaries that limit these possibilities. In Butler's (1990) framework, gender identity is constituted by repeated performative expressions of gender, which means that gender is only as stable as the degree to which a person's performance is stable. She focuses on how boundaries around gender possibilities are imposed by language and how only gender identities that fall within cultural gender norms are intelligible and therefore possible (Butler, 1990). According to Butler (1990),

Inasmuch as 'identity' is assured through the stabilizing concept of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of 'the person' is called into question by the cultural emergence of those 'incoherent' or 'discontinuous' gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined (p. 17).

I am extending this notion of intelligibility and possibility to encompass gender, sexual, and racial identities, which are all demarcated by boundaries of cultural norms and are maintained by both self and others. For instance, Bettie (2014) describes classmates maintaining boundaries around identity possibilities at the intersections of gender, race, and class that determined group belonging. Similarly, Lee (2009) discussed maintaining boundaries around racial expressions between groups of Asian students and of gender and sexuality within these groups. I will engage with intelligibility mainly in terms of the possibilities that are made available by cultural norms, which I will refer to as identity possibilities.

Gendered subjects in school

Gender performance in schools is often framed around masculinities and interactions between masculinities and femininities. As such, it is necessary to discuss theories of hegemonic masculinity before delving into how gender theories appear in educational research. Hegemonic masculinities are gender performances that marginalize or subordinate other masculinities and femininities through boundary maintenance behaviors such as misogyny and homophobia and are formed in relation to other masculinities and femininity to ensure the dominant position of men (Connell, 1995; Dalley-Trim, 2007; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012; Kehily, 2001). Aligning with Butler's (1990) gender performance, masculinities are fluid and formed at the intersections of race, gender, and class, and those masculinities that are marginalized in some instances become hegemonic in others (Connell, 1995; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012). While there are multiple gender possibilities, masculinized public culture sustains hegemonic masculinities, leading to gender as an issue for resistance among young people who may perform anything from hypermasculinity to unmasculinity (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinities are not uniform across time or space, making it necessary to understand masculinities regionally and comparatively, but also globally and transnationally (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Pascoe (2007), who observed and interviewed students to learn about masculinities in schools in the US, draws a connection between sexuality and its relation to gendered identities. Pascoe (2007) mainly sees this connection in the ways that masculinity is expressed through sexual discourses of power. Drawing from Butler (1990, 1993), gender is produced through repeated performance of masculinity or femininity and

constant reference to a particular gender norm while actively repudiating other gendered possibilities. For example, many young White people performing what they understand to be the only sort of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, rely on homophobic and sexist comments and acts against feminine people to foreclose other gendered possibilities (Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997). Pascoe (2007) specifically found that both White male and female-bodied students performing hegemonic masculinity exhibited sexually harassing speech and behaviors toward more feminine people. Homophobic comments were used less frequently for this purpose among Black male-bodied students, who Pascoe (2007) observed were more likely to employ Whiteness as a way of maintaining boundaries around gender performance. “Precisely because African American men are so hypersexualized in the United States, White men are, by default, feminized, so *White* was a stand-in for *fag* among many of the African American boys at River High” (Pascoe, 2007, p. 71). Black male-bodied students often signaled their involvement in hip-hop culture by putting intentional care into their outfits and cleanliness and were respected for their dancing skills, which were all seen as feminine for White male-bodied students (Pascoe, 2007). Through her ethnographic engagement at River High, Pascoe (2007) was able to share the perspectives of a range of students concerning gender, sexuality, and masculinity in ways that are rarely seen in the US due to strict limitations on ethnographic research with students.

Within the field of gender and education, some scholars support a shift towards research on gender identities, subjectivities, identifications without centering masculinity due to the binaries it creates (Francis, 2010; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012). Masculinities and femininities reduce gender analysis to types of masculinity and

femininity with male and female bodies as the foundation, while these gendered performances are not restricted by biological sex (Francis, 2010). As such, Francis (2010) and others have begun to engage with gender monoglossia and heteroglossia (Francis, 2010; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012). Francis (2010) finds that gender-conforming (monoglossia) and non-conforming (heteroglossia) ways of analyzing gender performances appear to be more applicable to a larger number of students than female masculinity or male femininity.

The conceptual tools of gender monoglossia and heteroglossia facilitate a marrying of these two positions: we may see patterns of gendered behaviors and inequalities as expressive of monoglossic gender practice, but within this be attuned to the complexity and contradiction at play (heteroglossia), both in the diversity of gender production, and in our categorization of it. (p. 488)

Put another way, gender monoglossia subscribes to masculinist social epistemologies and bears ideological beliefs of the dominant group operating under the binaries of masculine and feminine (Francis, 2010). Gender heteroglossia, on the other hand, engages with gender as embodied and evolving (Francis, 2010). As such, this notion of gender heteroglossia matches more closely with that of Butler's (1990) gender identity as fluid and constituted by repeated performance.

Gender heteroglossia is used analytically in the school-based studies of Francis (2010) and Archer et al. (2012), which both took place in England and focused on gendered performances among high achieving students. Francis (2010) found that diligence and hard work at school feminize male students, which leads to them being seen as feminine and subject to homophobic bullying, while intellect masculinizes female high achievers who are positioned as asexual spinster scholars (Francis, 2010). Looking more closely, a subset of high-achieving girls balance the masculinity of academics with

hyper-feminine gender performance through flirtation and extroverted behaviors to mask assertiveness, confidence, and resistance. “Hence ‘precocious femininity’ functions somewhat to filter or mask aspects of production which would otherwise be constructed as masculine, thus maintaining the illusion of a monoglossic gender dualism” (Francis, 2010, 486). Similarly, high-achieving popular boys balance feminine traits of reflexivity, articulate communication, and a focus on schoolwork with strong abilities in sports.

Archer et al. (2012) identify two types of gender performances among female science-inclined students – feminine scientists and bluestocking scientists. The feminine scientists are a group of female students who balanced their scientific interests with performances of heteronormative femininity such as interests in popular culture, music, and sports.

Not only do they [gendered identity performances] need to be continually defended, ‘fought’ for, and negotiated (as a form of ‘acceptable’ femininity) but must avoid the ‘risk’ of geek identity and must also operate within a wider context of structural (and gendered) inequalities and potential (future) ‘chillier climates’ within the wider field of science. (Archer et al., 2012, 978)

Archer et al. (2012) make note of the fact that these science-oriented and heteronormative gendered performances are always in tension and must be constantly maintained for these girls to be seen as feminine. In contrast, bluestocking scientists construct themselves as non-girly and focused on academic success (Archer et al., 2012). They tend to have more boyfriends than girlfriends due to the association between female academic success, asexuality, and genderlessness. Archer et al. (2012) note that while the feminine scientists are mainly middle-class White students, these bluestocking scientists are predominantly South Asian. In both cases, female science identities are often associated with middle-class femininity rather than working-class or minority ethnic

performances of femininity which leaves little space for girls outside of the middle-class to imagine science careers as an option (Archer et al., 2012).

Francis (2010) and Archer et al. (2012) identified ways in which students engaged in gender heteroglossia, performing masculinities and femininities that either gave them the appearance of fitting gender norms or that distanced them from gendered expectations. However, as with most research and theories on gender performance in schools, these studies focused primarily on academics, gender, and class, with less emphasis on race. In my intersectional analysis, I incorporate the concept of gender as performance into an intersectional framework that can address the interactions between gender, sexual, and racial identities more completely.

Identity Possibilities and Intersections on Social Media

In this section, I discuss the works of Cho (2018), Jenzen (2017), and Tanksley (2016) to better understand how queer youth, youth of color, and queer youth of color engage with specific social media spaces as learning spaces, space to express identities, or spaces in which boundaries around identity possibilities are maintained. Jenzen (2017) focuses on social media use among trans and gender non-conforming youth. Cho (2018) look at social media spaces that tend to maintain heteronormative and cis-gendered identity boundaries as well as preferred forms of social media used by queer youth of color. Tanksley (2016) studies how Black girls fight against stereotypes through memes on social media.

In a mixed-methods study, Jenzen (2017) combines a close reading of social media posts with group and individual interviews with young people in a queer gathering spot in the UK. Jenzen (2017) finds that trans youth respond critically and creatively in

face of transphobia and cisgender online paradigms built into sites such as Facebook and Instagram and choose to engage with YouTube vlogs, Tumblr, and gender identity specific comics instead (Jenzen, 2017). Based on five years of cyber ethnographic participant-observation and multiple qualitative interviews with eleven queer youth, Cho (2018) finds that Facebook and Twitter are seen as dangerous spaces due to their “default publicness” - a social network’s orientation toward publicity, connection to offline social networks, and emphasis on state-validated identity through connections between email addresses, phone numbers, and IDs. In these spaces, participants’ self-presentation is monitored by friends and family based on raced, sexualized, and gendered normative assumptions about what public behaviors are acceptable (Cho, 2018). As such, participants discussed how they often created separate Facebook accounts for family and friends. However, even when participants carefully curated their profiles, they were occasionally outed through comments on photos or posts and faced social consequences (Cho, 2018). Among Jenzen's (2017) participants, Facebook was used mainly to publicly declare name and gender changes.

It is for these reasons that queer youth, and particularly queer youth of color, turn towards more anonymous or “secluded” social media sites like Tumblr where they carefully curate their connections (Cho, 2018; Jenzen, 2017). Participants discussed Tumblr as a place to go not only to socialize but also to learn about their gender identities and sexual orientations.

Tumblr, in contrast, was a space where they could let loose, express more intimate and deep emotions, did not feel the pressure of constant surveillance, and could learn a lot about how to make sense of the world around them and its various antagonisms, including a sophisticated

vocabulary regarding race, gender, and sexuality politics. (Cho, 2018, p. 3187)

To put it differently, Tumblr offers a safe space where queer youth of color can make connections and build a critical consciousness of messages about gender identities and sexual orientations dominant in society.

In addition to Tumblr, Jenzen (2017) found that YouTube vloggers allow trans youth to see and interact with each other across distance and make meaning through sharing transition stories. Some vloggers also share experiences with relationships, gendered bathrooms, experiences at school and home, depression, gender dysphoria, and choosing clothes, among other topics. Several participants in the study noted that they “paid close attention to every detail in the vloggers’ videos, including body language, style, voice, fashion, demeanor and physical changes, and commented on how useful they found this information located outside the narrative content” (p. 1637). Notably, Jenzen (2017) observed that the majority of Trans vloggers online and participants in the study were White, but Whiteness was rarely if ever discussed within the community. As such, Jenzen (2017) found that queer youth build connections and learn from each other through social media spaces including Tumblr and YouTube.

In a slightly different approach, Tanksley (2016) studies Black girls’ self-representation and resistance to misrepresentation in the US through the lenses of Black feminist thought, critical race theory, intersectionality, and media literacy. Tanksley (2016) explains that while online media is built upon the beliefs of color-blindness and post-raciality, there is pervasive racism and sexism on social media that people of color and women navigate daily. As such, “Historically oppressive stereotypes about Black female promiscuity, hostility, and ineducability are still regularly disseminated in popular

web series hashtags, and Instagram memes with large Black female viewership” (Tanksley, 2016, p. 246). In other words, media depictions of Black women and girls are often hypersexualized, hyperaggressive, and undereducated. As such, girls have made protest memes of text written over images on Instagram to critique this racism, sexism, and colorism and to challenge the internalized racism that comes with constant racialized misrepresentation (Tanksley, 2016). These memes serve to create a counter-story that represents the intersectional oppressions experienced by Black girls (Tanksley, 2016). Challenging the gendered and racialized representations in media that reinforce negative stereotypes of Black women and girls, the makers and sharers of these memes create a space in which Black girls can respond to and validate their experiences while presenting themselves in ways that they would like to be seen.

Young People, Boundaries, and Agency

Young people, boundaries, and agency are studied and theorized about by researchers who take a broad range of approaches. Within the field of education, perspectives on young people’s agency are diverse. As DeJaeghere et al. (2016) explain in their overview of youth agency and education around the world, some scholars and development practitioners view young people’s agency as something to be cultivated through education in order to ensure that they are able to make positive life decisions. Other scholars, including those who focus on hidden curriculum, study how schooling fosters or constrains agency through the maintenance or removal of boundary maintenance around identity possibilities (Apple & King, 1983; DeJaeghere et al., 2016; H. A. Giroux, 1983; Martin, 1983). Yet another group of sociologists and anthropologists focus on youth agency as constrained by classism, sexism, and racism (DeJaeghere et al.,

2016). Critical youth scholars engage with agency as existing in every young person, but limited by boundaries maintained by family, classmates, educators, and social media (Best, 2007; Clark & Richards, 2017; O’Loughlin & Van Zile, 2014; Prior, 2013). While many groups of youth, education, and agency scholars emphasize how young people enact agency within constraints, I see space for young people to enact agency as a way of transgressing boundaries as it is used in critical youth studies (DeJaeghere et al., 2016; Martin, 1983; O’Loughlin & Van Zile, 2014; Prior, 2013). In this section, I explain critical youth studies perspectives of boundaries and agency to clarify how I conceptualize young people’s positioning in the world.

Adult researchers in many fields conceptualize young people as in-between, no longer innocent children, but not yet adults. According to Best (2007) however:

For some time now, youth studies scholars have treated children and youth as reflexive social agents and producers of culture, active in the complex negotiations of social life and contributing in significant ways to the everyday construction of the social world, not as subjects-in-the-making but as subjects in their own right. (p.11)

In other words, youth are agentic beings who actively construct their social worlds and resist repression. From critical youth studies perspectives, young people are “recognized as active beings in their present state rather than perceived only through their potential as a future investment in adulthood” (Clark & Richards, 2017, p. 133). To fully engage with them, scholars and other adults must acknowledge that young people are active creators and expert knowledge-holders of their social worlds, not merely passive recipients of boundaries established by adults (Best, 2007; Clark & Richards, 2017; Prior, 2013).

In their theoretical work, (O’Loughlin & Van Zile, 2014) view young people from an ecological lens as rhizomes, constantly growing horizontal root systems that spread in

all directions from a central origin and starting new shoots when old ones are severed. This means that young people are born with many identity possibilities and have the option of reaching toward or away from these possibilities throughout their lives. Adults tend to limit children's possibilities by conceptualizing them in certain ways and superimposing their own constructions onto children's bodies while remaining silent about alternate identity possibilities (O'Loughlin & Van Zile, 2014). Recognizing the absence of discussion around identity possibilities, O'Loughlin and Van Zile (2014) state, "Silence in a family and community, for instance, may limit expansive possibilities for imagining self in terms of gender possibilities, racial and ethnic possibilities, class possibilities, or any subaltern subjective identifications" (p. 47). In other words, adults form and maintain boundaries around young people's identity possibilities through words, actions, and silences.

As adults enact boundary maintenance behaviors, these boundaries become more restrictive and the child is forced to grow in designated directions according to systems of language and power (O'Loughlin & Van Zile, 2014). For instance, parents of a female bodied child may raise them according to their understandings or beliefs about what a little girl should do and enjoy. The parents may dress their child wear colors such as pink and purple, that are commonly associated with girls in the US. They may also provide toys such as dolls and limit their child's access to stereotypically male toys such as blocks or trucks. By making choices and offering opportunities to their child based on an assumption that the child will identify as cisgender female, these parents unknowingly limit the gender identity possibilities available to their child. Despite adult boundary maintenance activities, young people can reach beyond those barriers to find and express

identity possibilities that were not previously available to them. Adults can also aid in the building of young peoples' consciousness to develop awareness of the systems maintain boundaries around identity possibilities at home, in schools, and on social media (Martin, 1983; O'Loughlin & Van Zile, 2014).

Conclusions: Identity possibilities, boundaries, borderlands, and pushing back

I see Butler's (1990;1993;1997) theoretical work as central to my understanding of how identity possibilities are created and how boundaries placed around these possibilities are maintained to uphold culturally normative identities. Anzaldúa's (2012) borderlands theory looks more in-depth at the complexity and relationality through co-formation of power structures that lie at the foundation of these cultural norms and the experiences of people whose identities transgress these norms. Critical youth studies perspectives inform my understandings of how boundaries around identity possibilities are maintained by adults, classmates, and educators through formal and hidden curricula and the ways in which young people navigate these boundaries. Connecting the theoretical background of identity possibilities and intersectional analyses of multi-dimensional identity expressions in schools, I look at experiences of young people developing their identities in spaces where identity boundaries are maintained by religion, family, classmates, friends, and teachers in this dissertation.

Chapter 3: Methodology/design/methods

Introduction

In this chapter, I present and justify my research design for this study. I begin by reviewing the theoretical framework that I use as the foundation of my study to answer the following questions: How do young people engage with identity possibilities enacted by family, schooling, and social media as they construct their racial, gender, and sexual identities? Narrowing my focus to the areas of school, home, and media, I ask these questions:

1. How are boundaries around possible identities for young people defined and maintained in varying spaces throughout their lives?
2. How do young people enact agency in their expressions of identity within these spaces?

Then, I will explain and justify my choice of research sites, design of the study, methods for the study, research instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and any ethical issues related to this research. This is a two-part study with different methods and approaches for the in-school youth research and online zoom interviews with adults. I will discuss both parts of the study independently with labels in the headings to provide clear organization.

Student Research

Critical Youth Studies and Interactive Research Methods

Approaching this research from a critical youth studies perspective, I find it important to reflect on Best's (2007) four main characteristics of a critical study of youth.

First, a critical youth studies research design should take into consideration power dynamics in interactions between the researcher and participants (Best, 2007). As will be discussed further below, a researchers' status and student-teacher dynamics may lead to situations in which young people are pressured to participate in research (Leonard, 2007). Second, the researcher should acknowledge the connection between how researchers present youth voices, the impact of their research, and how research findings can, in turn, shape future youth experiences (Best, 2007). For instance, the way I select and represent student data may impact the experience of those young people in the future either positively or negatively. Third, critical youth scholars should be committed to conducting ethical and empowering research with youth that will focus on making positive change in their social realities (Best, 2007). Finally, as adults learning about the perspectives of young people, critical youth scholars must practice reflexivity to avoid interpreting data according to their own experiences or understandings of youth (Best, 2007).

It is with these four characteristics in mind that I selected research methods and ways of analyzing data that were intended to place the voices of participants at the forefront. I selected the photo-voice project and social media journal activity to learn from students about their own experiences with identity formation at school and on social media. Rather than interpreting the photovoice project and journal myself, I conducted interviews with participants which I treated as their interpretation and analysis of their experiences. Interviews with participants about their experiences in health education classes also helped me to gain a better understanding of how young people learn about their identities through official and hidden curricula in the classroom.

A Single-Sited Case Study of Deep River Central School

As mentioned in chapter 1, this research was intended to be a comparative case study of two schools. However, due to COVID-19, it became a compilation of a single-sited case study and life story interviews. Considering the multiple forces at work in the shaping of young people's identities during their everyday lives at school, I conducted a case study of young people in a small school in a conservative area of New York State which I call Deep River Central School (DRCSD) in this dissertation. Taking a more adaptive approach, I shifted my theoretical framework throughout my research design and data collection to better fit the research needs of the school and the emerging data (Yin, 2017). I collected data for this section through three activities - a photovoice activity and interview, a social media diary and interview, and interviews about health class. I analyzed the data from these activities together allowing for data triangulation. After analyzing the data, I chose to include one participants' in-depth data in this dissertation.

Selecting Schools and Gaining Access

The participating school, Deep River Central School (DRCSD), was selected due to the superintendent and school board's interest in having me conduct research partially as an evaluation of their anti-bullying measures. This site was particularly interesting because it is a rural, conservative school district in New York State trying to carry out anti-bullying policies from the state. In the 2019-2020, DRCSD had only White-bodied teachers and the majority of students were White. There were a total of three Black students and four ethnically Bosnian students who generally presented as White in the seventh and tenth-grade classes that I observed. Three students in the health classes that I observed were openly queer.

I gained the approval of the DRCSD superintendent and school board through an in-person meeting with the superintendent and a letter to the school board. However, as Leonard (2007) states, “It [access] is not just a matter of getting past the initial gatekeeper but a process of continuous negotiating and building up trust and rapport with individuals at a number of different levels” (p. 136). Therefore, I spent a month and a half from the second week of January until February 24th when the ethical review committee approved my research building rapport by with teachers and students in DRCSD as an observer and occasional substitute teacher before beginning my data collection. Fortunately, I was already familiar with many teachers and some students in the school, as I had worked there in 2017 as a permanent substitute teacher and attended the school as a young person. In return for their generosity, I have made two presentations based on findings from my time at DRCSD, one to the school counselors and psychologists of the middle-high school and one to the equity and diversity working group. The most remarkable finding from the student part of the research was that participants most frequently discussed specific teachers and their classrooms as the safest and most comfortable spaces in the school. In response to that finding, many of the questions and takeaways from educators and administrators at these meetings reflected an interest in how to replicate the classroom environments that students described as safe and supportive.

I recruited participants from seventh and tenth-grade health classes mainly because DRCSD invites Planned Parenthood to provide short-term sexuality education lessons in seventh-grade and tenth-grade health classes, which would have informed my original research focus. While I ended up studying identity formation more generally, health classes remained a great entry point into the school. I sat in on health classes daily

from the second week in January until March 13, 2020, to allow students time to know me. While I did not successfully gain consent from the parents of every student in the classroom, which the ethical review committee required if I wanted to observe students, the teacher allowed me to observe her and be present in her classroom. I was invited to sit in on drug prevention and sexuality education lessons on sexual assault, consent, gender identities, and sexual orientations, and STIs taught by visiting instructors.

To gain assent from students and consent from parents, I talked about my research with young people from each seventh and tenth-grade health class. Then, I had them complete assent forms so that I could gauge their interest (see appendix a). I did not inform the teacher of who had assented or not to give the students the freedom to choose without pressure (Leonard, 2007). I also sent consent forms home with each student to be signed and returned no matter what they selected on their assent forms, and had students return them to me whether or not they were signed. This process added another layer of anonymity to who was participating. After collecting assent forms from students and receiving completed consent forms from their parents or guardians, students who were interested could participate in the photovoice, social media diary, or interview to the degree that they and their parents/guardians specified.

Methods, Data Collection Procedures, and Sampling

In this section, I describe my approach to the research, including the role I took as a researcher, methods, data collection procedures, and how I selected my participants for each data collection procedure as they relate to my theoretical framework. After introducing my role as a researcher at DRCSD, this section is organized by methods, moving from a justification of each method to how it will be used specifically in my

actual data collection to maintain continuity. I have included a table at the end of this section to present my data collection procedures and sampling methods visually as well.

The Researcher. I had originally planned to take a role referred to as “The Least Possible Adult” or the “Least-adult role,” which would have involved avoiding acting like a teacher or authority figure to minimize difference and distance between an adult researcher and youth participants (Scheer, 2017). The least-adult role may be constructed by distancing oneself from other adults and actively participating with youth. However, there comes with this positioning a dual nature of participation due to the necessity to step into an adult role on occasion either to support a teacher or intervene in a seemingly dangerous situation (Hadley, 2007). It is this dual nature that led the ethical review committee to request that I take on a “most-adult role” rather than a “least-adult role.” In response to this requirement, I took a role in which I interacted with both students and teachers equally and was prepared to respond to situations in which a student was in danger.

When I first started sitting in on health classes, I introduced myself to the students as a researcher, told them to call me Rose, and then sat at a desk with a notebook as if I were a student. The classroom teacher also called me Rose and sometimes asked me questions about my experiences with certain topics. I went to school each day in jeans and a sweater with only a bottle of tea and a notebook. After intense pressure from teachers and staff at the school, I also worked occasionally as a substitute teacher; on those days, I would dress professionally. Acting as a student in one class and a teacher in another made it difficult to maintain a distance from the student-teacher power dynamic, but I did try to take on a researcher role by approaching participants as equals whose life

experiences I would like to learn about. Throughout my experiences as a tutor and long-term substitute teacher, I have found that by showing interest in young people's lives through listening to their stories, talking about their hobbies, daily activities, and music preferences, and sharing mine with them as well, I have been able to build trusting and reciprocally open relationships with young people. This worked with a few students at DRCSD as well, particularly in one tenth-grade class where I taught them how to do the 20s Charleston for our last class together.

Photovoice activity. Whether or not participatory methods are actually emancipatory for youth or merely serve to shape youth into actively participating citizen subjects is still subject of debate (Clark & Richards, 2017). For instance, while participatory methods may allow children's voices to be heard, there may be subtle coercion involved in researchers asking children to participate due to power dynamics between adults and youth (Clark & Richards, 2017; Leonard, 2007). However, as Greene, Burke, and McKenna (2018) state concerning photovoice and digital storytelling:

For researchers, these methods can enable young adults to take control over the research process because many youth can tell their stories more easily through imagery than in text, mitigate the unequal power relations that often create tensions between young people and adults who collaborate on a given project, and provide opportunities to produce knowledge. (p. 3)

In other words, photovoice and subsequent photo-elicitation interviews (PEI) offer an alternative means of expression that may be more approachable for youth than interviews due to the balance of power and communication style used in such interviews (Greene et al., 2018; Torre & Murphy, 2015). PEI can also build trust between the researcher and participants as participants take on a teaching role during the interview process to share

and explain their photographs, thus building rapport between participants and the researcher (Torre & Murphy, 2015).

Another positive aspect of PEI is that it helps the researcher to see from the participants' perspectives and may give the researcher access to places that they cannot physically go (Allen, 2011a; Torre & Murphy, 2015). "Researchers using PEI ask open-ended questions, seeking to see the world through the eyes of the participant, and often uncover ways of knowing that are quite different from their own" (Torre & Murphy, 2015, p. 6). While many researchers engaging with visual methods acknowledge the opportunities to learn from participants, scholarly works including how participants construct the phenomena of interest or actively construct their identities through the research are fewer (Allan & Tinkler, 2015). Allan and Tinkler (2015) state, "Some visual researchers recognize that research participants can often work out what they know, think and feel in the process of generating images" (p. 805). For instance, one group of researchers learned about children's feelings of inclusion and exclusion in school through observing their deliberations over what to photograph (Allan & Tinkler, 2015). While I was not present for the process of taking photos, I asked participants about how they chose what to photograph and what the photographs meant to them through PEI.

Despite concerns about the truly emancipatory nature of participatory methods for research with youth, Allen (2011a) has found that photo methods, in particular, have the potential to reveal different insights about sexuality, gender, and schooling than might be found using other methods. "The value of these methods lies in their ability to explore broader features of sexualities and schooling than the official curriculum, policy and classroom practices" (Allen, 2011a, p. 487). Allen (2011a) also found that young people

became more conscious of sexual discourses and practices while collecting images.

Through Allen's (2011a) research using photo methods, she found that there is no singular sexual culture of a school, but rather “a multitude of discursive and material practices by which sexual cultures of schooling are iteratively enacted” (p. 489).

Focusing on masculinities in schools, Donoghue (2007) also found through a photovoice study on how male young persons experienced space and place that informal spaces in the school were sites where performance, control, and surveillance of masculinities occurred, and young men constituted their masculinities. Both examples show the potential for photo methods in research about gender and sexuality.

I recruited eight participants for the photovoice activity, two for the social media journal activity, and four for the health interviews simultaneously by collecting assent forms in class and sending consent forms home with each student in the seventh and tenth-grade health classes. Inspired by the photovoice approaches of both Donoghue (2007) and Allen (2017), I gave each participant two days to take ten pictures, or a full packet of film, using an Instax camera. These photos related to a set of prompts used by Donoghue (2007) including:

1. Where can you be yourself in school?
2. Where do you feel safe?
3. Where do you learn to act in certain ways?
4. Where do you feel afraid?
5. Where do you learn about your body?
6. Where do you learn to act like a man or a woman?

I chose to keep these prompts broad to fulfill the anti-bullying goals of DRCSD while still learning about space, racial identities, gender identities, and sexual identities. Of note in Allen's (2011a) research along with PEI conducted by other researchers (Torre & Murphy, 2015) is a concern about consent for both use of images and inclusion of participants and non-participants in photos. As such, I wrote up a set of norms around how to take pictures of people and more private spaces and reviewed these with each participant before showing them how to use the cameras (appendix b). For instance, Allen's (2011a) participants took photos of their friends without showing their faces and after gaining consent and took photos of areas such as the locker rooms only when they were empty. The participants at DRCSD followed similar rules. After collecting photos, each participants' photos were laid out on a table during our ten to thirty-minute interviews and we discussed the photos following the protocol in appendix c. To build rapport with participants, I designed this interview protocol to allow participants to take the leading role in our conversations (Torre & Murphy, 2015). These interviews provided the most interesting data from participants at DRCSD.

I purchased five refurbished Fujifilm Instax mini 8 instant cameras with a roll of ten pieces of film for each participant for the photography project. I selected these cameras because students needed less training than they might with more complicated digital cameras and we could look at hard copies of photographs taken with the instant cameras for the interviews. I labeled each camera and kept track of who had which camera, who was still waiting to get a camera, and who had completed the interview. Only one camera was lost during this process.

Social media journal activity. Two participants volunteered and were consented to keep a social media journal. This very small sample size made it very difficult to observe any generalizable patterns in the data. In addition, the participants prepared their journals in different ways and their experiences with social media were very unique from one another.

While social media is often viewed by schools and educators with concern, scholars interacting with new media have found that young people are using this medium to learn from each other (Itō & Antin, 2010; Jenzen, 2017; Pascoe, 2012). Pascoe (2012), among other critical youth studies researchers, has found that techniques such as content analysis, interviews, and ethnography could be used to learn about how young people use technology in their everyday lives. Marlowe et al. (2016), for instance, used a media diary to track the details of what sorts of social media participants used, with whom they interacted, for what purposes, and for what duration. Media ethnographers Berg and Düvel (2012) also find that media journals provide participants with opportunities for active involvement in the research process as they generate data from their own lives independent of the researcher. This independent data generation is particularly important for research on young people's experiences because it gives participants more opportunity to share their voices outside of researchers' realms of interpretation. However, new media research, including social media journals, does come with its challenges. Adult researchers must remain conscious and reflexive about their assumptions about youth media use and identify how these assumptions may impact their data analysis and interpretation (Pascoe, 2012). For instance, due to my lack of involvement with Vlogs and lack of experience using Tumblr, these could have been areas of social media that I

inadvertently excluded from my research design before reading Cho (2018) and Jenzen (2017).

Recalling the importance of social media as a social space for establishing and maintaining relationships, I see social media as an important social space where young people come together and perform their identities (Itō & Antin, 2010; Marlowe et al., 2016). Considering the importance of social media as an information source and community space for queer youth and youth of color, I recognize social media as a space of unofficial sexuality education (Cho, 2018; Jenzen, 2017). With these aspects of social media in mind, I prepared a participatory social media journal activity to study how young people learn about and perform their racial identities, gender identities, and sexual orientations.

For the social media journal activity, participants were asked to record their social media use for two days and I asked interview questions to clarify if and where they encountered bullying or discussion around identities. They were given a printed instruction sheet with an example of a possible social media journal format which they could use to record their interactions and other forms of social media use, including YouTube vlogs or Tumblr (appendix d). They had the option to keep their journal in any way, but both participants worked from memory during our interviews. Each participant took part in an interview based on their social media journals following the protocol in appendix e. One of these interviews was approximately 10 minutes long, while the other was around 20 minutes long. Appendix d provides an example of the format of the social media journal that will be created for each participant at the beginning of their journaling week. It is inspired by Berg and Düvel's (2012) social media diary procedures.

Individual interviews. While interviews are standard practice, they have certain pitfalls. For instance, interviewees may add an element of performativity, thus leading to inconsistencies in their stories or between stories and lived experiences. However, according to Scheer (2017) who approaches interviews from a critical youth studies perspective, “Treating interviews as performative constructions allows for lies told in interviews to become analytically fruitful” (p. 72). These performative constructions add yet another layer to the data, that of how participants want to portray themselves (Scheer, 2017). Interviewees’ performativity may also be informative about the gendered ways that they choose to represent themselves during interviews. As such, interviews may also provide an opportunity to study the gendered performance of self (Butler, 1990).

Therefore, while acknowledging the pitfalls and potentials of interviews, I engaged in two types of interviews. First, I followed the photo-voice and social media journal activities with individual semi-structured interviews (see appendices c and e) with participants to learn more about how they experience their identities in the school space. I met with each participant during a free period in their schedule for follow-up interviews, one for each activity, that lasted between ten and thirty minutes. During these interviews, I used individual participants’ photos from the photovoice project or their social media journals as prompts for our conversations to learn about student experiences through their own analysis of their work. By inviting young people to teach me about their experiences through photos and journals, I strove to both equalize the power differential between researcher and participants. I also created a space where I could become aware of my assumptions about youth, social spaces, and official and hidden curricula at school (Greene et al., 2018; Pascoe, 2012). These social media journal interviews and

photovoice interviews informed my understanding of participants' experiences with boundary maintenance behaviors enacted by classmates, educators, and individuals on social media.

The second type of interview focused on young people's experiences with official and hidden curricula within a health education classroom. While the photo-voice and social media journal activities and interviews focus mainly on informal social and learning spaces, this set of interviews focused on experiences in formal learning spaces. These interviews were administered to four seventh and tenth graders at DRCS D who were interested in participating and had parental consent. Each interview was administered during the participant's free period in a quiet room in the library or the counseling office and lasted between ten to thirty minutes. Therefore, these interviews did not impact class attendance. The interview protocol is included in appendix f.

Each seventh and tenth grade participant and their consenting parent or guardian chose one or more of the research activities. Table 1 presents each participant, identified by a number, and the data collection methods that they participated in.

Table 1

Student Participants and Data Sources

ID Number	Photovoice	Social Media Diary	Health Interview
1	X		
3			X
4	X		
5	X		X
6	X		
7	X		
9	X		
10		X	X
11	X		
12	X	X	X

Adult Research

Social Change and Narrative Research

I chose to conduct life story interviews with adult participants due to the connections between oral history work, shared narratives, and social change. Oral history became popular in the 1970s during social, labor, and women's movements (McLeod & Thomson, 2009). This form of data preservation and sharing incorporated more ways of knowing and experiences of typically neglected people in research, thus challenging the

hegemony of academic research (McLeod & Thomson, 2009). “They [oral and life history] offer ways into documenting and understanding how social change and circumstances are experienced at the level of the subject, and how the articulation of life stories and memories can itself effect personal and social change” (McLeod & Thomson, 2009, p. 51). In addition, the stories of oppression and resistance shared by previously under-researched groups allowed critical scholars and social activists to “transform understandings of the past and to build counter-traditions, which in turn could contribute to reshaping the present, and the future” (McLeod & Thomson, 2009, p. 36). Therefore, life story interviews match well with the social action aspect of intersectional analysis.

Critical race theorists also emphasize the importance of placing experience in context for a reader (Lawrence, 1995). Lawrence (1995) acknowledges the importance of embracing the many forms of storytelling that are attributed to different ways of being and share the experiences of marginalized peoples. According to Lawrence (1995), “only as these rich and varied stories are increasingly heard will we begin to shape a new public discourse” (344-345). Banks (1995) illustrates this use of narrative in her article about the many paradigms Black woman law professors must shift between. Throughout the stories of two particular experiences, Banks (1995) explains how she must navigate spaces in which she is seen as Black, White, female, or poor and deprived due to her race, gender, and profession. The use of narrative in this article helps readers to grasp some of the complexities of Banks' (1995) experiences and calls the readers' attention to the intersecting forms of power that affect her life.

Atkinson (1998) and McLeod & Thomson (2009) discuss the transformative power of sharing one's own story, being heard and acknowledged by those who hear or

read one's narrative. In addition, life stories often carry both individual and social aspects. According to McLeod & Thomson (2009),

First, memories are both individual and social, and manifested, apprehended and sustained in particular life stories. The oral or life history interview therefore can take a dual focus on the collective and the individual, and memories provide a bridge between the two. Second, individual memories, while idiosyncratically interesting, have the potential to illuminate cultural myths, dominant memories and public histories. In telling their story, individuals are involved in a process of making their own history, and speaking back to and co-constructing public or collective histories. The analytic and research focus is thus both on what is remembered- or forgotten- (the content) and on how those memories are told (the form). (p. 40)

In other words, people choose how and what to share during life story interview in order to contribute to collective histories. As such, it is necessary to make note of both what is said and what is excluded from personal narratives.

Life Story Interviews - Methods, Data Collection Procedures, and Sampling

This section of the study included nine in-depth life story interviews (Atkinson, 1998) with adult members of the Lindy Hop/Balboa dancing community over Zoom, including myself. Life story interviews are conducted with several intentions, including creating a first person autobiographical narrative of the interviewee in their own words (Atkinson, 1998) or contributing to a co-constructed collective history (Crawford et al., 1992; McLeod & Thomson, 2009). This form of interview allows participants to tell their stories in ways that highlight important personal truths through the beginning, conflict, and resolution of impactful moments (Atkinson, 1998). In addition, it can be seen as a form of memory work in which what is remembered, what is forgotten, and how stories are told are all of analytic importance (McLeod & Thomson, 2009).

Methods. The interview questions for this part of the dissertation are based on suggested life story questions from Atkinson (1998) and were pilot tested for their open-ended and inclusive nature (appendix g). For instance:

1. Do you recall any times when you were taught about racial, gender, and sexual identities by your family? How do you think those lessons affected you?
2. Was it a struggle for you when you were growing up to match your own attitudes towards gender and sexuality with those of society?
3. What did you learn about yourself, including your racial, gender, and sexual identities, during your years at school

I obtained participant permission to either record or take notes during these interviews (appendix a). After transcribing the interviews and doing the first round of data analysis, I shared prepared narratives with participants to review my understanding of their experiences and ensure that I am sharing their stories in a way that feels good to them. However, very few participants responded to the narratives. The data from these interviews reveal unique ways in which young people experience and navigate boundaries around their identity possibilities at home, at school, and over social media.

Selecting Participants. I began this second wave of data collection by using two techniques to identify interested participants. As the Lindy Hop/Balboa community is constantly shifting and I recruited participants during COVID-19, I was only able to approach people who were my Facebook friends or who I could find on that social media platform. First, I thought about which members of the Lindy Hop community, who were my Facebook friends, actively used this platform as a space to perform their racial, gender, and sexual identities. Based on those criteria, I directly asked ten people if they

would like to participate. Of these ten, seven people agreed to be interviewed. I also posted an open call for participation on Facebook in the hopes that other members of the community who had not come to mind in my initial brainstorming would step forward to participate. I recruited one additional participant through this more general recruitment post shared on my Facebook home page.

Self as participant. Atkinson (1998) and feminist historians Crawford et al. (1992) and McLeod and Thomson (2009) discuss life story interviews and memory-work in terms of the researcher working with participants. Kuhn (2002), however, sees potential for memory-work to be an auto/biographical activity. Autobiographical memory-work allows the researcher to reach back into their past and reconstruct events to make sense of present experiences (Kuhn, 2002). Through such self-study, I believe that I can also come to recognize my own biases and their possible origins.

Reflecting on the potential of autobiographical memory-work, in addition to the eight adult participants who consented to be interviewed, I also invited a colleague to interview me following the same protocol. I used this interview in two ways. First, I analyzed the data from this interview alongside that of the other participants. Second, I placed my own story in conversation with the stories of other participants by including excerpts from my interview, my dialogue in participants' interviews, and reflections that arose through the interview and data analysis process throughout each chapter. I found that by sharing my experiences alongside those of other participants, both I and the readers are constantly aware of my positionality and the ways my experiences manifest in my interpretation of the data.

Process Consent. I checked in with participants after each step of data collection, transcription editing, and analysis to ensure that they still consented to participate and gave them the option to re-evaluate whether they preferred pseudonyms or their real names. The beliefs behind this type of consent are discussed further in ethical considerations. While I had hoped to give the adult participants many opportunities to look over my representation and analysis of their stories, very few responded outside of saying whether or not they would like to switch to a pseudonym.

Once participants were identified, I sent each participant an invite to a Zoom meeting through Facebook messenger. All Facebook messages and email exchanges related to the Zoom interview or narrative reviews were deleted promptly after completing the interview and sharing the transcription for the participants' approval. All email communications were conducted through my University of Minnesota email account.

Data Gathering Processes

As explained above and outlined in Table 2, this is a two-part study involving both students and adults. The photo-voice activity, social media journal, and interviews about health class reflect the initial school-based, student-focused design of this study. These methods were intended to engage students with their school and social media environments and the follow-up interviews were designed to draw out participants' experiences while engaging in these spaces. The life story interviews with adults were designed to directly approach participants' experiences developing their gender, sexual, and racial identities at home, in school, and on social media. In the end, the life story interviews provided the rich data necessary for writing this dissertation.

Table 2

Data Collection Methods, Selection Criteria, and Justification

Type of Data Collection	Selection Criteria	Justification
Photo-voice activity and interview about pictures	Seventh and tenth-grade students at DRCSD who express interest in participating and have parental consent	Learn about how young people experience spaces concerning emotions and bullying around the school
Social Media Journal activity and interview	Seventh and tenth-grade students who express interest in participating and have parental consent	Learn about how young people engage with social media to perform their identities and participate in informal education about identity formation.
Interviews about experiences with health education in general	Seventh and tenth-grade students in DRCSD who express interest in participating and have parental consent	Learn young people's perspectives on health education and available resources for supporting physical, emotional, mental, and social health.

2-hour in-depth life story interviews on Zoom	3-10 members of the Lindy Hop/Balboa community over the age of 21	Participants were adults who were willing to share their experiences developing and expressing their racial, gender, and sexual identities across time.
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Data analysis procedures

Recalling the four elements necessary to approach research from a critical youth studies perspective, maintaining reflexivity is important during both data collection and analysis (Best, 2007). While collecting data, I kept an ongoing journal record of emerging ideas during data collection to serve as an analytic memo to support data analysis. I continued these memos throughout the data analysis process. I prepared and shared back narratives based on each adult participant's life story interview. A few participants did choose to read through their chapters to ensure that I was representing them fully and accurately. Unfortunately, due to COVID 19, I was unable to follow up with any student participants to member check and ensure that I accurately portrayed their data.

In terms of data analysis, I used Atlas.ti to identify themes within my analytic memos, observation field notes, and interview transcripts from student participants and adult participants through an iterative process of open coding and writing code memos (Emerson et al., 2011; Miles et al., 2014). Through this process and reflection on my theoretical framework, I identified seven large themes – community, family, friends,

identities, school, self, and social media which explicitly reflected my research question and interview protocol. I followed this with focused coding of themes, sub-themes, and writing of memos about relationships between thematic groups (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Emerson et al., 2011; Miles et al., 2014). I identified agency and boundaries as sub-themes for spaces and invisible identities and intersections as sub-themes for identities.

Table 3 presents each code, a brief explanation of the code, the sub-themes of agency and boundaries that I identified within each theme, and example quotes from each sub-theme.

Table 3

Codes and Example Quotations

Code	Comments	Sub-themes	Example Quote
Community	Community refers to society as a whole and communities such as dance communities, religious communities, etc.	Agency	At Uptown Swingout where I wore an all-gold sequin suit and everyone was like, that's a suit. That's amazing! And I was like, "This is my moment. This is where I feel amazing." And no matter where I was expressing my gender doesn't matter.
		Boundaries	I remember there being some lessons at church and in discussion groups where it's like, "No, I am not a damsel in distress waiting to be rescued." They use like these really horrible

			analogies all the time.
Family	Family includes parents, guardians, siblings, and extended family.	agency	But like my parents never really put me into like a specific box as far as like female conformity goes.
		boundaries	My family is very religious on both sides. I am still a practicing Christian, but I see that a lot of things around say gender roles or gender expression were definitely more cultural than they are scriptural.
Friends	The code “friends” includes both friends in school and out-of-school spaces.	agency	she identified as bi and she was a few years older than me. And it was just, I think the first, openly bi, close friends that I had. So we were able to just talk about experiences a lot.
		boundaries	I'd say like, yeah, like my friends and I were just mean, you know, like, like, a lot of like the boys and I am gonna keep using boys that are under 18 below but a lot of the boys were just like mean to when we were like

			bullies and like name called and picked on one another.
School	School includes classmates, educators, and how they enact and maintain boundaries or leave space for agency	Classmates-agency	
		Classmates-boundaries	I went to school with my nails painted. And there was a girl that was just like, what are you doing? You can't paint your nails, like, that's what girls do. And I was like, oh, and then I felt very embarrassed.
		Educators-agency	And you can literally just always be in there and she will not care if she has a class and you're like, obviously not like disrupting anything, you can just sit in there. And she'll be fine with that.
		Educators-boundaries	I generally had zero information about those broader categories from school because I am pretty sure nobody would have shared that with me in my peer group.
Self	Codes within self are about agency and boundaries that do not seem to arise from external forces but seem to be purely internal.	agency	So yeah, you could say some of my restraint. My restraints are religious. Um, but that's something I've chosen for

			myself, and it's not something anyone else puts on me.
		boundaries	If I had attempted to try to get an internship before I transitioned, I know that I wouldn't have put 100% of my effort into it like I am right now with all the other jobs and internships that I am currently applying towards. Because I never felt that anything that I did was worth it.
Social Media	This code focuses on social media as a learning and sharing space.	agency	the reason why I found my word for myself is because there are some Instagram groups that are about like, that are focused on asexuality.
		boundaries	I think like, I think there is like, I am like following folks here like, I guess you can call them like mainstream gay. On like Instagram where, like, there, there's definitely like a body norm that you like.
Identities	I am using invisible identities to refer to identities that are not	invisible	Well, I think all of those things for me were invisible

	mentioned, are "natural", "always knew", or have not come out yet.		until I encountered somebody whose identities were different or became aware that I encountered somebody whose identity was different.
		intersections	Even though I am a minority, it's still very different, you know. Problems that black bodies face are just very different from problems that Asian bodies face.

Relationship between themes, research questions, and organization

My research questions shifted throughout the process of analyzing the data to better reflect the emergent themes and sub-themes. In the initial phases of this study, my questions were more focused on the spaces and less focused on boundaries and agency.

My previous questions were as follows:

1. How do young people appropriate or reject identity possibilities learned from family, classmates, educators, and social media as they construct their racial, gender, and sexual identities?
2. How do young people use social media spaces to find information or affirm their identity expressions?
3. How do young people enact agency in their engagement with and expressions of identity possibilities?

In an effort to align my research questions more closely with the themes and sub-themes that I identified through analyzing the data, I restructured these questions to clearly reflect boundaries, agency, and spaces.

1. How are boundaries around possible identities for young people defined and maintained in varying spaces throughout their lives?
2. How do young people enact agency in their expressions of identity within these spaces?

These questions better reflected my theoretical framework and the ways in which I interpreted the data.

Identifying themes that reflected spaces and groups of people, rather than specific identities, allows me to analyze intersecting power relations within these spaces that contributed to the formation and maintenance of boundaries around identity possibilities. For example, I approach Gabi's family as one that highlights the importance of female independence, while maintaining boundaries around racial and sexual identities. Rather than trying to parse the ways that racism, sexism, and cis-heteronormativity each individually impact gender, sexual, or racial identities, I approach each participants' identities as linked. Many participants also describe the ways in which their identities are interconnected and their expressions of their identities are inseparable. In addition, I treat both identities and the intersecting power relations that place boundaries around them as relational through co-formation and try to make note of ways in which identities and boundaries grow and shift together.

Reflecting these themes and subsequent research questions, I have divided each of the findings chapters and the conclusions chapter into two sections, one exploring

boundaries maintained by parents, classmates, educators, and individuals on social media, and the other exploring the agency of participants.

Ethical issues

Avoiding Essentialization

Recent educational research around gender, sexuality, race, and class often emphasizes how young people of color, queer young people, or young people of certain classes are essentialized in both policy and teacher practice (Bettie, 2014; Kendall, 2012; Pascoe, 2007). Intersectionality and critical youth studies emphasize avoiding the essentialization of identities (Best, 2007; Collins, 2019). Assumptions made about young people are historically grounded and can be perpetuated through the ways that researchers discuss stereotypes around schooling, gender, race, and sexuality. To avoid essentializing young people to the best of my ability, I selected methods such as photovoice and social media journals that would allow participants to share their experiences without as much influence from me. After that, I had colleagues look at my projects and interview protocols before using them at DRCSD. I also piloted the life story interview questions with a transgender adult who provided me with feedback about both my questions and question delivery to reduce any accidentally essentializing questions or behaviors.

Working with Minors

Working with minors, especially around topics related to race, gender, and sexuality, is considered very sensitive by ethical review committees. While I did not study sexual activity to any extent, I had to be prepared for any occasions in which participants might talk about sexual activity that is deemed illegal in the state of New

York due to the age of consent. While this did not happen, participants could have revealed experiences with sexual assault, violence, or harassment. As a mandated reporter, I would have been expected to report any information related to abuse or neglect of participants even if this information is shared with me confidentially. According to Scheer (2017),

The ethical dilemmas surrounding mandated reporting remind us of the delicate balance between approaching our young participants as active agents, capable and entitled to at least help make decisions that affect their lives, and as vulnerable individuals entrusted to our care in one capacity or another. (pp. 76-77)

To prepare both parents or caretakers and young persons, I indicated my responsibilities as a mandated reporter on consent forms and verbally during data collection.

Consent

In addition to ensuring that participants were aware of my mandated reporter status, it was essential to ensure consent from all participants. In terms of the youth research part of this study, this was particularly difficult due to the many layers of gatekeepers that limit researchers' access to youth and simultaneously wield power over young people. According to Leonard (2007), principals often make executive decisions to grant access and impose researchers upon teachers without their consent. Therefore, I worked on my own to build connections with teachers and gain their consent for allowing me to sit in their classrooms. Participant assent and parent consent were collected before participation in any activities or interviews and consent forms were written in plain language that most people of different linguistic and educational backgrounds could understand (see appendix a for consent and assent forms). However, due to relations of power between parent, teacher, and child, participants may be coerced into signing the

consent forms (Leonard, 2007). “The freedom that children have to opt out of school-based research may be particularly limited given the taken-for-granted power relationships that exist within schools, which locate adult teachers as key decision makers” (Leonard, 2007, p. 138). Therefore, I followed Leonard's (2007) lead and provided mechanisms for young persons to choose to participate confidentially on their assent forms that only I saw. Those who chose to participate then brought permission slips home to their parent or guardian for their consent. All students returned their permission slips to me, whether they were signed or not. Young people who initially assented to participate were then allowed to participate in the activities to which their parent or guardian consented. They also had the option to opt out of any activity at any point in the study.

The adult participants of life story interviews shared much more in-depth and personal information than young participants due to a number of factors including the nature of the methods involved and the ages of participants. According to Smythe and Murray (2000), due to the emergent nature of narrative interviews, informed consent before the interview process isn't enough. “Hence, narrative research participation, like psychotherapy, is something one has to experience firsthand to make an informed decision about” (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 319). As such, I found it important to go through process consent rather than just an initial consent process with each participant. They describe process consent as follows, “In process consent, informed consent is a mutually negotiated process that is ongoing throughout the course of the research rather than something obtained just at the outset” (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 320). Part of the process consent is related to decisions around pseudonyms. According to Mukungu

(2017), choices to use names or pseudonyms may be tied to how data will be presented, so it is important to properly disclose how data will be analyzed and shared and revisit participants' perspectives towards the presentation of their data throughout the research process. As such, I followed Smythe and Murray's (2000) directives to explain the purpose of my research to each participant, including that I would check back with participants for renewed consent after every step of the process of analyzing and writing about their stories. "Just as researchers' knowledge about data use builds throughout the project, so too should participant consent" (Mukungu, 2017, p. 5). As Mukungu (2017) suggests, I have allowed participants to review their narratives and my analysis of their experiences with the power to remove or ask to anonymize any content that they feel is inaccurate or should be distanced from their name.

I engaged in process consent with adult participants by explaining the research process and reviewing the consent protocol before conducting the interviews, sharing the writing and analysis with each participant to ensure that their stories are presented accurately, checking for consent and naming preferences after each step, and finally sharing how their narratives were analyzed with the larger pool of data before a final consent check.

Confidentiality, Anonymity, and Pseudonyms

Since race, gender, and sexuality research is fairly sensitive, it is essential to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of all adult and youth participants if they so desire. Confidentiality and anonymity protect participants' rights to privacy or not having personal information shared without permission (Smythe & Murray, 2000). More specifically, confidentiality guarantees that personal information will be kept private and

only shared to the degree to which the participant consents. Anonymity includes removing identifying information about participants before sharing research (Smythe & Murray, 2000).

As Prior (2013) suggests, all participants were allowed to select a pseudonym or keep their own name during their interviews and were given opportunities to change their original decision throughout the research process. All data has been tagged according to participants' chosen names and a list of names and pseudonyms has been kept in a locked document. However, some researchers have found that research participants view anonymity as silencing rather than protecting and prefer to choose their own names rather than using a pseudonym (Lahman et al., 2015; Leonard, 2007; Mukungu, 2017; Svalastog & Eriksson, 2010). For instance, Leonard (2007) describes child participant's struggles with anonymity:

Adults granted access to researchers based on guaranteed anonymity, but for children anonymity was an indication of their voices in part being heard through someone else, in this case, through their pseudonyms. In this sense the children were silenced. (p. 147)

As a critical youth scholar, I must negotiate the delicate balance of fulfilling the expectations of gatekeepers while ensuring that participants feel their voices are heard. In this case, I initially allowed student participants to keep their names for our interviews but have since selected pseudonyms for those students whom I quote in depth or refer to in this dissertation. I made this decision after undergoing an additional audit by the University of Minnesota ethical review committee, which left me very conscious of following strict protocols and erring on the side of "safety" for student participants.

From a range of critical perspectives including indigenous and critical feminist perspectives, requiring pseudonyms emerges from a White, western, masculine orientation (Lahman et al., 2015).

Groups are defined as vulnerable when they are socially marginalized in society at large or seen as carriers of few or no juridical, economical or other resources to guard their own interests. In native studies, as in the field of post-colonial studies, protective approaches by Westerners have been understood as imbued with power, as paternalism expressed through colonialism and imperialism, and as the opposite of respect for native peoples' autonomy. (Svalastog & Eriksson, 2010, p. 106)

According to Lahman et al. (2015), when researchers create or mask the identities of their participants, they cause participants to lose their voices, which are the focal point of life story research. When researchers choose anonymity for their participants, it takes away participants' right to be known and can cause participants to disappear from the research (Svalastog & Eriksson, 2010). Therefore, participants need to consider the positive and negative aspects of using their names or choosing pseudonyms, such as exposing oneself and one's social circle, before consenting to one or the other (Lahman et al., 2015; Mukungu, 2017; Svalastog & Eriksson, 2010). Mukungu (2017) argues that academic writing should not harm participants whether or not their actual names are used. Therefore, it is the researcher's responsibility to dissociate data from participants through not attributing names to contentious quotes, summarizing, removing location references, or omitting data if necessary (Mukungu, 2017). As such, I chose to include revisiting name choices as part of process consent so that adult participants could make an educated decision for themselves about whether to use their name or a pseudonym. Names in this dissertation are a mix of pseudonyms and real names.

Limitations of the study

As mentioned above, researching with young people involves working with several gatekeepers (Allen, 2011b; Leonard, 2007; Prior, 2013). While parents, schools, and the ethical review board work to protect youth from unethical research, they also construct young people as lacking agency or voice (Prior, 2013). As a scholar approaching my research from a critical youth studies perspective, my understanding of youth agency differs greatly from theirs. This became particularly clear during my ethical review approval process, which involved three sets of revisions and two full-committee reviews. The length of the ethical review process impacted how long I could collect data at DRCSD, leaving me with only three weeks to recruit, consent, and collect data from participants.

Several of the ethical review issues that I ran into were due to differing perspectives on how to share information about this research and gain consent from schools and parents. The principal and teachers of the school in an urban, liberal community which I had intended to include in my study saw no issues with me presenting my research as a study of how students make sense of gender identity and sexual orientation. However, the superintendent of DRCSD suggested that I soften my language and refocus my letter of introduction to include more about anti-bullying efforts and identities in general. The ethical review committee was concerned about the different stories of my research that the materials for the two different schools told and I ended up refocusing all consent and assent forms and interview protocols to focus on identities more generally, rather than just gender identities and sexual orientations. Contrary to what is presented in the CITI training, the ethical review board deemed public schools as

private spaces, thus making it so that I needed consent and assent from all students and their parents in any spaces where I planned to conduct observations. This proved to be impossible, so I observed only one teacher in one classroom at DRCSD. While the ethical review process proved frustrating at the time, it was also an opportunity to revisit my study and address the noticeable lack of discussion around race that had been pointed out by my committee.

While at DRCSD, I found that I had designed this study with specific expectations around young peoples' abilities to critically analyze their experiences and surroundings. As such, I was surprised to realize that many of my participants seemed to lack the critical consciousness necessary to make the photo-voice and social-media journal projects particularly fruitful as data sources. As my focus switched from sexuality education, gender identities, and sexual orientations to more generalized identities, the health education interview protocols became less directly related to my focuses of study, but I did not want to modify the protocol and risk another lengthy ethical review process.

In addition to shifting the focus of my project during the ethical review process, I lost access to one of my two schools due to COVID-19 in March 2020 and needed to find a way of collecting additional data online. This opened up the possibility of conducting life story interviews with adults, which proved very fruitful.

Organization of the Findings

I have organized the findings of this study into four chapters, each of which shares the experiences of two to three participants who share similar identity labels. The chapters are divided into five sections, reflecting the sub-themes of boundaries and agency that arose through my coding process. The first section is an introduction of the

participants and specific arguments of that chapter. The second section is on the boundaries around identity possibilities that participants encountered at home, in school, and on social media. The third is a section on agency, which discusses participants' choices to express identities beyond the boundaries or to reflect and push against certain aspects of those boundaries. The fourth section attends more directly to interactions between participants' racial, gender, and sexual identities. The last section draws conclusions from these findings.

Chapter 4: White, Cis-Female Gender-Play

I had to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me.

-Gloria Anzaldua (p. 38)

My best memories of high school are from when I began to perform female masculinity. I would wear my brother's cargo pants, a tank top, and an unbuttoned button-up shirt. Many of my friends were boys and we'd sprawl out around a lunch table to tell rude, sexualized jokes. I was one of them, but also not one of them. I was a science girl, a high achiever, a mediocre athlete, and the lead in the school musical. I was, like the women I am about to introduce, a White, cisgender female enacting gender play, shifting between masculine, androgynous, and feminine gender expressions. It was only while working on this project that I began to recognize my queerness, thus placing me even further into this grouping with Esther, Ginny, and Gabi.

[Ginny] Do you have any particularly big highlights that aided in the development of your gender and sexuality?

[Rose] Well, the biggest one is the other day I was on frickin Instagram and started looking at the asexual spectrum. And then I was like, Oh, I have not been assaulted. I was in situations where I was just not attracted to a human, and they thought that I was and I somehow thought that I was too. And then I was in this situation, and I couldn't really escape it. And I started realizing that I have been physically attracted to two people in my entire life and because of that, I need to just be really careful. So that has been mine. And it was on social media.

[Ginny] I feel like the big thing was certain sexualities are more represented [in media], which seems like an obvious statement to people who have gone through it. But, it's something that like, you know, I do not know how to phrase this...like being gay or lesbian, in some ways is almost like,

[Rose] easier to conceptualize?

[Ginny] Yeah, because media, however twisted that media has been, I am not saying that those people have been appropriately represented, necessarily, but they're more present. And so that I think is interesting. But because pansexuality and asexuality are not really represented very much in any form of media, it took me a really long time to realize that I was bi. I had a few times in high school where I was like, "I have really strong feelings for this woman. Am I a lesbian?" and then I was like, "Oh, no, I am really into this guy. Can't be lesbian, must be straight." Because I just did not really conceptualize pansexuality as a thing until college. I've had a couple of Ace and like Demi friends that are like, "Yeah, there's just like, no representation for those labels." And then all of a sudden, you see it on the internet once and you're like, wait, yeah, that's how I feel... Is there a word for that?

Introduction to participants and main points

I imagine that if Esther, Ginny, Gabi, and I sat down at a table together, we would have a lot to say and a lot to agree on. First, gender and sexuality are inextricably linked, thus pushing us towards alternative gender expressions that signal queerness. Second, asexuality, bisexuality, and pansexuality are less frequently discussed in the media than other forms of queerness, thus leaving us with fewer role models and fewer information sources. Third, as White women, issues of gender and sexuality hit us in the face, whereas race is only an afterthought unless we are pushed into situations in which we question our racial identities. Taking this third point into account, I acknowledge that discussion of gender and sexual identities dominate this chapter and, as such, I have added a specific section focusing on Whiteness and a presence or lack of racial awareness.

This chapter is organized into four main sections in order to address my research questions on how boundaries around possible identities are defined and maintained and how young people enact agency in their responses to these boundaries. The first section is an introduction to the main points of this chapter and to the participants whose experiences will be shared and analyzed. The second section focuses on the definition

and maintenance of boundaries around gender and sexual identities, including some discussion of alternative gender expressions for cisgender White women. The third section attends to the research question about agency, analyzing how Esther, Ginny, Gabi, and I choose when to hide and when to reveal our sexual identities. This chapter includes an additional section discussing participants' understandings and uses of the word "privilege" and their engagement or lack of engagement with Whiteness as these topics are important to address but did not fit naturally into either the section about boundaries or about agency.

Esther, Ginny, and Gabi

Esther is the only student participant who I have included in this dissertation. She was a student at DRCS D during the 2019-2020 school year. While she preferred to use her own name, I spent a long time deliberating over parts of her story that I am sharing, and have chosen to give her the name Esther for this dissertation. She is deeply involved in environmental sciences and advocacy, participating in the environmental club, science Olympiad, and the school composting program. She describes herself as:

I am pretty granola, like that type of person. Very earthy, very spiritual, or like sometimes you hear me talk about vibes a lot, or manifestation, or just like energies. But also I can be pretty edgy in terms of how I dress. And then I also identify as bisexual. And what else do I identify as... Oh, I am a vegetarian. And I am just a lover of all things I just have so much love.

She walks around the school filling it with her energy. She is who I hoped to be in my high school days, casually occupying every inch of the space available to her.

I like the androgynous style of clothing sometimes; I like to dress feminine, but also sometimes it's just like... Luckily, I've got small boobs so if I want to look like I do not have boobs and like certain shirts and stuff, it's easy for me. I just like the way it looks, but I, myself, I like the pronouns she and her. And I've

always identified as a female. I am proud to be a girl. As much as periods suck, I am a girl.

Esther stands out for her fashion, dressing androgynously one day, in vintage the next, and high femme on the third day. She is unpredictable except for predictably pushing on the boundaries around female gender expressions.

Ginny, like Esther, is a cis-gender, pansexual White woman. She uses the terms pansexual or bisexual to define her sexuality because she is interested in people with non-binary genders as well as cisgender people. Unlike Esther, she is less connected to her gender identity as a woman but does keep she/her pronouns.

I do not express myself in a traditionally feminine way. I've definitely had thoughts since high school and college about gender where I've considered, would non-binary be a comfortable label for me. And it's interesting because, non-binary, I do not mind that label. That's fine. I think I would be comfortable with any pronouns, it's just that I am used to she/her so it's not a transition that I feel compelled to take for myself. I am comfortable in my gender. I've thought of different ways to express it like whether I would want to cut my hair short and stuff. I just have not made that jump. So it's not like I have not considered, there have definitely been days where I've felt more masculine or more traditionally male. Is that a transition that I would like to think for myself? And yeah, it's not, so it's something that I've considered because of my, not hate, but my not wanting to be traditionally feminine. But you know, I definitely have days and times where I am like, yeah, femininity is great. I would love to do my makeup and my hair today and look more feminine. But most of the time, it's not really a conscious consideration. It's more just me being lazy and not wanting to think about it. So I throw on jeans and a T-shirt or a sweatshirt and jeans, it's not necessarily me wanting to express one gender expression over the other. It's more just like I am lazy and want predictability in my expression.

Ginny is as predictable in her gender expression as Esther is unpredictable, often wearing her jeans and a t-shirt or sweatshirt and going about her day.

Gabi differentiates herself from Esther and Ginny as a White, bisexual, cisgender woman by her Jewish ancestry.

I consider myself a White female. I do consider myself Jewish even though it's happened on the wrong side [her father's side]. We've never been very religious, but I feel like that culture is really strong and my family and my dad's side of the family, the American Eastern European stereotype shows pretty strongly there. Pretty happily identify as female. Even if I have some more masculine traits, it's not something I've ever really questioned in myself. Even growing up as a tomboy, I still feel very strongly that I am a girl or a woman, you know. And I am bisexual, but it's not something I think about or talk about a lot because I realized it probably in high school, but I do not feel super sexually attracted to people in a way that I would ever want to act outside of a romantic relationship. And it's just been on my lap that I've been in relationships with men or it's just been a lot easier to start a relationship with a man. So yeah, I mean, I identify as it and I will talk about it occasionally but it is not something that I tell everyone. I do not feel like I need to. I do not feel comfortable in a queer space much in terms of like, if I am going to Pride, I think I would be in people's way.

Gabi, notably, is the only one of these three women who listed her Whiteness in her description of her identities. She also places herself differently through her discomfort in queer spaces, and the qualifications that she makes around her bisexual identity. I feel like I can empathize with her, being among the letters in LGBTQIA+* but not feeling a place in that community.

Boundaries Around Queer Expressions of Gender and Sexuality

Esther, Ginny, and Gabi identify as female with some masculine or androgynous gender expressions. They attribute these gender expressions somewhat to growing up as tomboys. I noticed connections between bisexuality and masculine or androgynous expressions in the experiences of these three individuals, potentially pointing towards a broader trend. In this section, I will focus on Esther, Ginny, and Gabi's reflections on how family, schooling, and social media have served to build or break boundaries around their gender and sexual identities and their responses to boundaries around their identity possibilities in terms of gender expression.

Family as Givers of Freedom or Constraint

Esther, Ginny, and Gabi describe many ways in which they grew up in households that were liberal spaces in terms of gender expression. However, they each came in contact with boundaries around gender identity possibilities within their households that established what kind of women they could become. Esther and Ginny both pushed against boundaries around clothing choices. Gabi experienced more limitations in terms of racism and homophobia intertwined with her gender identity possibilities.

Esther grew up with her mom and stepdad. She describes her mom as open-minded, except for when she wears certain types of clothing. Esther tells me,

I moved here from a different town. So I already have a different perspective on all that stuff because I am not tone deaf to their [her classmates'] jokes [about gender and sexual identities]. And then I come from a bigger school. So there were more people of color. There were more people in the LGBTQ community, and I also have a really open-minded mom, except for when I wear crop tops. And she's traveled a lot. So I've just grown up in a household where it's not a big deal and there are people here who are very racist. There are very racist people here.

Esther has occupied spaces that are diverse in terms of race, gender, and sexuality. She describes her upbringing with a liberal mom who responded to this diversity as “not a big deal” as giving her the critical consciousness to recognize the deep racism, misogyny, and homophobia carried into DRCS by students. She extends this consciousness to her mom’s behavior and that of people on the internet.

I used to be a really insecure person. And now I've grown out of that and who I am and I am proud of my body and I'll wear crop tops. And my mom doesn't like that. She called me a whore yesterday for wearing a crop top. I did not like that. But people have given me crap about it and like I'll post a picture in a crop top and they're like, people talk about it and let me live. Yeah, I am proud.

While Esther generally discusses her mom in terms of supporting her development of critical consciousness around race and sexuality, her mom also engages in the use of

misogynistic language to maintain boundaries around Esther's gender expressions and pride in her body. As such, Esther experiences push and pull from her mom at the boundaries of identity possibilities in terms of acceptance of genders and sexualities and rejection of Esther's clothing choices. In response to these acts of boundary maintenance from her mother and people on social media, Esther has placed herself in the borderlands where she is free to be proud of her body and can express her gender in whatever ways she wants.

While Esther discusses growing up in a liberal household with a generally accepting mom, Ginny talks much more about how she was raised without gendered boundaries. Not only was she not often forced to express specific forms of femininity, but she was also encouraged to explore stereotypically masculine toys and activities.

Gender-wise I mean, I have not had a lot of gender consideration. I mostly have been fairly comfortable with the label of woman and growing up I think I considered myself a tomboy, but I've recognized that internalized misogyny at this point in my life. So I've always like been fairly free of like gender expression which definitely I recognize there's a privileged position being a woman with that. But my parents never really put me into a specific box as far as female conformity goes. They never forced me to wear dresses. They never forced me to play with certain toys. They very much encouraged me to branch out with boy toys and girl toys. And they very much encouraged me to play with many different things. They did not put me in a gender box. They never forced me to have long or short hair or forced me to do certain things because I was a girl. Partly because of that I do not think I ever really questioned my gender. I was always free to do everything so I never really had the question as to like, "Why am I only allowed to do these things?" I never had that thought process because my parents never really put me into that box. I had short hair for a really long time as a kid. I always had more guy friends than girlfriends as a child. But you know, that's flipped since I've become an adult. Not important. But yeah so I never really felt like I was put into that kind of like box as a kid but that definitely made gender not a big deal in my mind. As far as sexuality goes, my sister used to identify as bi, now I think she more identifies as queer in general. Her fiancé is a non-binary individual, she goes by she/her and they/them. But they're also polyamorous, so that's been a big thing. She came out before I did, so seeing her coming out process made a difference in that I never had the question whether my parents

would accept it, not that I think I would have anyways because my parents have always been pretty like open-minded and like, open to that sort of thing. My parents always joke that I did not really come out to them. I just kind of like said in conversation one time about my attraction to women and they just kind of had to assume that I was pan, which they give me non-stop grief for [referring to friendly teasing]. So coming out was never really a consideration as far as my development.

Unlike many other participants in this study, Ginny describes feeling free to express her gender as she pleased and how her parents even encouraged her to try activities and toys that are not traditionally feminine. Highlighting the phrase “They did not put me in a gender box,” Ginny sees how other people were raised with gender boundaries dictating which clothes, toys, and activities were appropriate for their genders, thus placing her in a privileged position in terms of free gender expression.

On further reflection, Ginny recalls occasional conflicts early on when her mom tried to have her wear dresses to formal events.

I guess they did force us to wear dresses once in a while, but they conceded after a while. They realized I just did not like dresses. But they would always try to put me in dresses when we went to formal events and I had screaming matches with her [mom] as a second or third grader that I did not want to wear a dress.

After trying to establish a boundary around what girls wear for special occasions and having Ginny strongly refuse, her parents stepped down and stopped making her wear dresses, thus allowing Ginny to experience gender freely.

As she described above, Ginny had a role model in terms of sexuality. Her sister, who identifies as queer, was part of the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) in school and also raised her awareness around Tumblr. Ginny described knowing that she would be accepted by her parents after watching her sister’s coming out process, thus removing boundaries around accepted sexual orientations within their household. When it came time to come out to her parents, Ginny recalled inserting her attraction to women into

conversation rather than clearly stating her pansexuality. I interpret from Ginny's tone that her parents' teasing was directed toward the fact that she never directly came out to them, not that she identifies as pansexual. This teasing may serve to pull Ginny into her family's culture of sharing and illustrate their approval of her sexual identity.

Differentiating herself from both Esther and Ginny, Gabi sees many aspects of her gender expression as coming from values passed down to her from her ancestors.

I think on my dad's side of the family I still identify more with the [Jewish] culture because it is more of a community. I kind of feel like I am pretending sometimes because I do not know a lot religiously...but I've always wanted to identify more with my Jewish side, I think because it just has such an inherent community behind it. I can always find and see their last name and be like, "Oh, I am Jewish too like, Let's laugh about that." ...I learned from my grandma and my dad, definitely like an essence of frugality and being careful and learning about money from a young age. You always had an allowance and if it was something my parents did not deem a necessity or a gift that they wanted to buy then they would use the allowance or wanting to go see a movie or getting dropped off the mall as a tween, that was our money to manage. And I always had to be overly cautious with that money and hoard it, and I always did and I had it in my shoebox. And I think that's pretty steeped in the culture, not to make it more of a stereotype. But also not having a fear of a hell or anything like that and not thinking I am going to go to hell for things about myself. Thinking back, that is like pretty instilled in how my family acts, but everyone is still very strongly like there are some rules that you can break and that you should break for yourself, but know how to be good. We expect you to be good and that is the default. And we expect you to be successful and smart and make good grades. So my parents never were like sit down and do your homework, but if I came back and did not have an A, we'd have a conversation. So they pretty fiercely taught me to be independent that way that I do not think a lot of Christian White women really get. And it's also a product of my mother, though. Her family is pretty fiercely independent women. I think her great-grandma raised a child on her own when her husband died and when the kid was two, had this shop, came to the US all on her own. And then my grandmother met my grandfather in the 40s. He was a world war two vet and she had her master's degree before she would get married, which is super weird for the time, and she always worked and was super successful. My mom and dad are the same age but my dad skipped a year in school. When my dad was in law school, my mom got her MBA in a year and some change just to catch up with my dad so that they could move at the same time and start their careers at the same time. They did not have kids, and that was a very, very conscious choice until at least 10 years into their marriage, until they

were 33. They got married at 23 and they had me at 39. So they very much wanted to focus on career and making their own money. My mom is an investment banker and my dad is a lawyer, and she made more money than my dad for a while. She retired when I was two and is a lovely woman, but fiercely not domestic at all.

Gabi sees herself as a woman in a long line of fiercely independent women who were dedicated to receiving education, working to make their own money, and choosing when to get married and have children. While these values may be interpreted as non-traditional and somewhat liberating boundaries around gendered expectations, they may also place Gabi in traditionally masculine spaces where she must compete against masculinist privilege rather than in spaces where she can be empowered in her own way.

While instilling her with independence, Gabi's parents and grandparents also carried with them racist and homophobic stereotypes that they expressed through jokes or offhand comments.

My parents and my grandparents definitely were still somewhat products of their generation and like they would say things. My dad's best friend is married to a man and growing up we called them Uncle Rob and Uncle Sam and they're just friends of the family. But at the same time, he would make gay jokes. And my mom I am pretty sure is still afraid of lesbians for reasons I have not been able to figure out. And they're not gonna get mad at someone for doing what they want. They're not gonna get in anyone's way. But they will make comments or make jokes that I am like, that's not necessary. Like my mom making fun of a butch woman for the pants she wears and her haircut. Starting probably in high school, I had to start being like, "That's not cool and there's no reason for you to do that. She can do whatever the hell she wants and it doesn't affect you." So, I think having to kind of get past those stereotypes and seeing for myself, for sure happened in terms of sexuality. The same thing to some degree with race. I do not think anyone is inherently racist, but they do still have stereotypes that they hold for people and they might be really loving towards people that are close friends. It is not going to prohibit their relationships with anyone but they will have preconceived notions and prejudices that mean I still have to think about and stop myself from.

Gabi clearly states here that her father's gay jokes, mother's comments about lesbians, and their other verbal expressions of stereotyping have drawn and maintained boundaries

around gender, sexual, and racial identities that Gabi has to consciously recognize and push beyond. So while Gabi has learned values around independent womanhood, those came along with the weight of unlearning racism and homophobia.

Classmates and Boundary Maintenance Behaviors

Each participant recalls a notable lack of diversity in their schooling. Esther and Ginny had very few classmates of color or queer classmates. While Gabi was in a more racially diverse school, she also had few role models to show her how to be bisexual at school. The absence of people who were queer and out, and in Esther's case, the presence of people who made homophobic jokes, maintained boundaries around gender and sexual identity possibilities.

As Esther described previously, she hears many students at DRCS D making racist, homophobic, or misogynist jokes that maintain boundaries around identity possibilities for themselves and others. She sees these jokes most often in the case of boys making objectifying jokes about girls and some girls laughing along as if this boundary maintenance behavior limiting their gender identity possibilities is funny.

I'll see jokes and I'll hear guys making jokes about girls, and they're like, 'No, I am joking.' Or it's like, 'It's just a prank.' And it's just like, you can't joke about stuff like that. Women have been and are continuously oppressed.

Esther, who has developed the tools to critically analyze her classmates' behavior, sees these masculinity-affirming jokes that place boundaries around femininity as a form of oppression, just as many researchers do.

Rather than having friendships with people complicit in these boundary maintenance behaviors, Esther has found a community of like-minded, bisexual friends at school who express themselves through their clothing, hairstyles, and piercings.

You'll see friends walking around wearing almost the same thing. Same shoes, all White, all straight hair, and it's just like, Where's the flavor? Oh, but then there's my friend group. We walk around like y'all...we have dyed hair. We have piercings. We wear fun outfits. Literally my entire friend group is bi.

Esther differentiates her friend group of White, Black, and Brown, bisexual students from other groups of friends, who are White, heterosexual students, through their “flavor”.

These other friend groups enact boundaries around how they express their identities, resulting in a homogenous effect in which everyone wears the same clothes and styles their hair in the same way. In contrast, Esther’s friends’ expressions of alternative femininities transgress the boundaries enacted and maintained by many friend groups in the school. That does not preclude Esther’s friend group from their own form of boundary maintenance around alternative femininities, but Esther does not discuss boundary maintenance behaviors within her group.

Similarly, Ginny’s experiences with restrictive boundaries around gender and sexual identities come more from school and society than from her family. She recalls how her school environment and lack of gender and sexual diversity placed limitations on her exposure to gender and sexual identity possibilities.

I grew up in a predominantly White area with pretty strong gender roles. My school was like...it's not like you would be made fun of if you were female and into science or something like that. It was pretty open-minded that way but the representation of nonbinary and trans people in my school was pretty nonexistent. And, you know, I did not develop my own sexual identity as it is today until I was in college.

While Ginny felt free to express her gender identity however she pleased, the nonexistence of non-binary and trans people placed boundaries around gender identity possibilities. She describes her process of growing up and developing her gender identity and expression as follows.

It's interesting because most of my friends in elementary school were guys. I think I had a few times in elementary school where I did not necessarily like disagree with the gender that I was assigned, but I was like annoyed about it because all of my friends were boys and I couldn't join Boy Scouts and stuff like that. I was like, 'Why am I in Girl Scouts? This is dumb.' But it wasn't necessarily gender-based, it was activity-based where I was like, 'Why are these two separate things? That doesn't make sense to me.' So I was both aware and not aware of my gender in elementary school because I was not aware that I had boys and girls as friends. It did not really matter to me and it did not get in the way of the activities that I was in and stuff like that. But I was aware of it because all of my friends were boys and there were definitely times where they would make comments about me being a girl and stuff. I was just kind of confused about it really where I was like, 'Why does it matter?' When I got into middle school, I gained a couple more feminine girlfriends. I did not really care about my expression as far as I did not want to wear dresses and I did not want to care about my appearance. And I still do not, it's just never been a concern as much. I know how to do different things, but that's more for the artistry than it is for the expression necessarily. I definitely noticed this gap in middle school where I was like, 'Wow, my friends care a lot more about this. Am I less of a girl because I do not care about makeup and stuff?' So there was definitely a consideration. I had a couple of friends that were very into makeup in middle school and I was just kind of there not caring and also being lazy as fuck. There were definitely like a few thoughts in my mind once in a while where I would wonder if this made me less of a girl because I am like I am. I thought of it kind of in terms of attraction where I was like, 'Am I like less attractive because I am less female expressing, less feminine?' So again existed as sort of a back thought but never enough for me to really do anything about it. I definitely remember trying to wear more feminine clothing a little bit more in high school or middle school. I would wear clothes that were maybe a little bit more feminine and you know, maybe different colors. I've never really been a fan of pink but I would try to wear more typically feminine colors more often than I did in elementary school. In elementary school, I just did not care. I dress now the way that I dressed in high school were in the winter I wear jeans and a sweatshirt 95% of the time and in the summer I wear shorts and a T-shirt 95% of the time. That has not changed. I got grief for that from a couple of my friends in high school. One of my friends made fun of me for a week by dressing like me and I did not realize it till Friday because she was wearing jeans and a sweatshirt the entire week. At the end of the week on Friday, I was like, 'You've been really underdressed this week.' I commented on it because she's usually very put together and she goes 'Ginny I was dressing like you.' I was like 'Oh...it's fine. I've accepted it.' In high school, I would say gender-wise, I was a lot more comfortable with the fact that I do not dress in a traditionally feminine way.

Ginny describes herself throughout this recollection as someone who doesn't care about her clothing or makeup. Clothing is often used as an outward expression of gender and sexuality, tied to societal notions of femininity, sexual orientation, sexual availability, or

sexual conservatism. As such, Ginny's choice to wear neutral clothes that do not fit into the proscribed styles of social signaling is targeted by her friends who put care into their outward expressions of femininity. Ginny's feelings of insecurity when she compared herself to her friends and questioned whether her lack of feminine gender expression made her less attractive may be attributed to the role of clothing as a form of social signaling. Her description of a friend dressing like her to make fun of her also hints at some boundary maintenance behaviors around expressions of femininity among her friends. Transgressing these boundaries around how girls were expected to dress, Ginny felt comfortable enough to continue with her personal forms of gender expression but was left with insecurities, thus experiencing the discomfort of the borderlands.

Due to the lack of gender and sexual diversity in her K-12 schools, Ginny experienced attraction to women but did not vocalize or act on this attraction.

I definitely think that college is really when I blossomed. I was just around a larger diversity of people. As we've been over, my high school was not very diverse. It was pretty conservative. So I feel like it wasn't necessarily that I felt closed off in any way in my high school, it was just that I did not experience different types of people really until college. So yeah, it wasn't a consideration and the person that I had a really deep relationship with in high school happened to be a man. I think I very easily could have developed that for a woman in high school or a non-binary person in high school. It just did not happen that way. He was one of my best friends, so it was not really a thought in high school, but that's mainly because I was in a relationship, not necessarily because it wasn't there. For pretty much all of my college life, I was single so I wasn't with a certain partner, so it was just kind of there.

Although her sister was openly out during secondary school, Ginny was not surrounded by other peers who expressed gender or sexual diversity. While she does not describe this lack of diversity or role models as a boundary around possible gender or sexual identities, it seems that this lack of representation did limit the availability of possible partners with whom she could develop her sexual identity. Besides, Ginny was in a monogamous

relationship with a man during high school, which meant that she did not have opportunities to investigate and act upon her interests in women and nonbinary people until after that relationship ended.

In college, Ginny's insecurities were more centered around sexual identity than about gender expression, which was her focus during high school. She describes occasional doubts around her pansexual identity because of her general involvement with cisgender men.

I had a couple more experiences where I was directly confronted with attraction. I was like, 'Oh, yeah, this is okay. This is a real thing in my life. Not just like me making it up.' Because being someone who has only predominantly dated men, there's definitely this stigma where you're like, 'Am I actually or am I just making this up?' But yeah, a couple of very validating experiences in college, where I was like, 'Ah, yes. Yes. I am not straight.'

This doubt and stigma may be related to the judgment that bisexual and pansexual individuals often face when they are in seemingly heterosexual relationships.

Heterosexual and homosexual identities are often seen as intelligible because both signify attraction to only one gender. Being attracted to people of multiple genders, bisexual and pansexual identities are often seen as unintelligible (Butler, 1993). Ginny recalls how gender expressions and sexual identities are often interconnected, with queer women tending to style their hair and wear body piercings in ways that indicate their queerness.

You know, the conversations that I've had with my roommate because she's also bi and she has been in a long-term relationship with a man. So we've talked a lot about that experience specifically of being pan and traditionally dating men. If you're not overtly expressing your gender differently, people assume that you're a straight woman in a relationship with a straight man. I've been relatively single so I have not felt the need to do this or to cut or dye my hair, you know do anything that is more traditionally queer, I guess. But my roommate, when she was dating her male partner for the first six months, she dyed her hair purple and she got a nose ring and she was much more conscious of her expression. She just enjoys those activities too, but we've talked about it a few times in that like there's almost

this need to overcompensate and scream to the world that you're not just a straight woman when you're in a traditionally male-female relationship but you're pan or bi. So that's been interesting.

Ginny points out that women in relationships with men are assumed to be heterosexual due to society's assumed heteronormativity. For bisexual or pansexual women dating cisgender men to be recognized as queer, they have to express their gender in ways that are outside of general female expressions. While she does not acknowledge this, perhaps Ginny does so in her own way through her daily gender expression, multiple ear piercings, and tattoos.

Gabi grew up attending a racially diverse school in Georgia that allowed her to challenge messages from home about identities that were within family identity boundaries – the straight, fiercely independent, Jewish, White woman. She entered the IB program and took courses that encouraged students to consider different perspectives. It was at this point that she realized that Jewish experiences, history, and identities were different from those of other White-bodied people.

I probably thought about Jewish identity being different, more than anything. In seventh or eighth grade, I had a language arts teacher who was Jewish and was just gonna have all her students have a holocaust unit for three months and just gave us really harsh grueling history through language arts. And other kids not having any concept of that in the class made me realize that like, “Oh, there is something different.” I have family stories of my grandma's cousin being born in Auschwitz and stuff that I just did not conceptualize as being unique.

It was also at this time that Gabi became aware of how people start at different starting points based on privilege.

So, it's probably still a similar time of like early High School, even though I had friends growing up pretty much of most races, but in high school really being intelligent enough to notice the differences and how that impacted them long term. I had a friend who was a Mexican immigrant, was an illegal immigrant. When we were applying for colleges, she couldn't apply to the same colleges and get the HOPE Scholarship that meant I could go to school for free. Because even

though she's been here since she was two or three, having the realization that she was lucky that she could go to school at a private school that would count her as an international student and that she could get DACA but that she was going to be tremendously more in debt without having any help from her family and having grown up in an apartment with three siblings that was two bedrooms. That's when I think I realized starting points and the difference in starting points for people. And I think in high school I was acutely aware of... my high school did not have kids that were... there were kids that you could tell were likely queer by how they presented themselves and their actions, but the number of people who were out was well below 10% still statistically. Even then I was like, it doesn't add up. I do not think we had any major coming out stories or anything like that. So my perception of that pretty steered towards like the media because I do not think anyone had any big thing about it.

Through her close friendship with a DACA recipient, Gabi began to recognize how structural inequality perpetuates disadvantage among the already marginalized. While she does not describe this impacting her expressions of Jewish Whiteness, Gabi does describe an increased awareness of her privilege as a White person.

Concerning gender and sexuality, Gabi mentions that she was aware of a discrepancy between the percentage of queer people in the US and at her school, signaling to her that either queerness did not matter or that one should not come out as queer within that space. While there was little information about what it meant to be queer from school, Gabi and her friends occupied a nerd-identified space that often overlapped with queerness.

[RH] What helped you most to develop your current understandings of yourself?

[G] I would say just probably my friends, and maybe to some degree the media that I was watching in high school. I had a lot of friends that...actually only a few are queer, and they weren't out at the time...but we were kind of in very nerd identified spaces, which I feel try to be open and attract a lot of people who are queer. We were super into Rocky Horror and Buffy the Vampire Slayer and stuff that has a very strong queer presence.

Gabi describes her friend group as attractive to queer people, perhaps because nerd-identified spaces transgress the traditional boundaries around gender and sexual identity possibilities.

Social Media as an Educational and Social Space

Esther, the youngest participant of the three, is most active on social media. While Ginny reads fanfiction and follows some accounts on Tumblr and Gabi rarely uses social media, Esther has several different accounts where she makes both public and private posts.

Esther uses social media as a tool for expressing her identities and sharing information on issues that are important to her. In her private stories, she expresses her femininity and works to support her friends in developing confidence around their bodies.

I've got two private stories. I've got a private story and I've got a private private story. It's like, I'll post like pictures of myself when I am feeling the most confidence and it's just like, I'll just be wearing my bra or something. And it's just my closest friends on the story. There are like 10 people. And my friends are like, 'Man, I wish I had that confidence.' And it's just like when I am confident I just like to show it off because I am feeling good. And then people, they'll be like, 'Oh my god, I wish I had your confidence.' I was like, 'You should, man.' I get to help bring people up because they'll be like, 'You're so confident.' I am like, 'You should be too. You're so gorgeous and stuff.'

In some ways, Esther's efforts to build confidence in her friends are in themselves a form of boundary maintenance. She is suggesting that they are being repressed by the boundaries around female gender expression maintained by school dress codes and societal expectations and they merely need to build more confidence to transgress those boundaries. However, she does not necessarily recognize that the boundaries surrounding each individual are different and she may have had an easier time transgressing them than some of her friends.

In more public forums, Esther focuses on her interests in climate change and feminism. When people post negative comments intended to place boundaries around Esther, she simply blocks them.

I've had climate accounts like environmental clubs and other activists following me I think. And I think some people have unfollowed me because of how much I talk about climate change. There was actually this one kid who I blocked because he was like, global warming isn't real. He stood up on my story. And I obviously made my point. And I argued with him and then I did not even block him originally after that. And then he commented something on one of my Instagram posts, and it wasn't even about climate change. He called me gay on my Instagram post. I was like, 'First of all, even if you're right because I identify as bisexual, even if there's some truth to that statement, you shouldn't even be saying that in a derogatory way.' I was like, 'Dude, totally' to the comment. And I was like, after the whole climate change thing and he would post stuff about Trump on his story all the time, I was just like, you know what, this isn't a person I want to have on my Instagram. So I blocked him.

While she is willing to engage temporarily with people who hold different perspectives, Esther focuses much more on people who share her beliefs and respect her identities. In this way, she occupies spaces that will not restrict who she can be as a queer, cisgender woman.

Ginny describes following fanfiction art pages on Tumblr and Instagram but not engaging in learning about identity possibilities within those spaces. Rather, Ginny turned to fanfiction sites for information on possible genders and sexualities.

This actually would make a big difference as a kid, in middle school I discovered fanfiction. And so I consumed a lot of queer media via fanfiction because it's a lot of queer media, written media that is unpublished. A lot of the published queer media is just not very good. The published books are about being queer, as opposed to fanfiction where the characters just happen to be queer. That was why I enjoyed reading fanfiction and why I still enjoy reading fanfiction so much is because the relationships involved are not like your token is not that you are queer. Your character does not exist just to be gay or to be trans or be non-binary or whatever. There are other plots in place and the characters just happen to be gay or something. So, a lot of my consumption of reading about different sexualities and reading about different genders came from fanfiction and a lot of

authors and fanfiction are very educationally focused as far as they write about a variety of experiences and normally if there's sex or gender involved a lot of them address safe sex and safe sex between different types of partners and gender as far as accepting new genders and, especially because I grew up in the era of Harry Potter fanfiction, where a lot of it deals with people going through transitions just in general, not just with gender, but people discovering and learning about themselves differently because they're going through it as teenagers. And I read that when I was a teenager. So it was interesting, I have talked with a couple of other friends about how formative fanfiction was as far as my understanding of gender and sexuality goes, but very much like I would say, a lot of where I started learning about different types of genders and different types of sexualities was via fanfiction, which I find really interesting. Because there's this whole generation of people whose introduction to different types of genders and different types of sexualities was through fanfiction and Tumblr. And so, I would say alternative forms of social media much more than traditional social media. Facebook, I have my friends and my family. But Tumblr...great place to just anonymously explore different types of genders and sexualities and different expressions.

Ginny learned about gender and sexual identity possibilities through fanfiction. Reading about characters who were part of a plotline and “just happened to be queer” normalized possible gender and sexual identities much more than books about queerness which tend to focus only on the queer experience.

Agency through Choosing to Hide Queerness

Embedded within the previous section is a discussion of Esther, Ginny, and Gabi's expressions of gender and sexual identities through androgynous or masculine clothing as an assertion of agency. This section will focus on a very different way that agency appeared in their stories. These three women and I all describe situations in which we chose not to share our queer identities. We assert our agency by choosing in which spaces to express our queer identities and where we will face boundaries that we do not wish to push against. In this section, I will analyze how these three participants and I enact agency in our hiding or sharing of queer identities.

I feel I am in conversation with Esther, Ginny, and Gabi when it comes to decision-making about when and with whom to share my sexual identity.

[Rose] Today, I am identifying myself as a cisgender female who is on the asexuality spectrum. But that's not part of my identity, it's just an explanation for how I experience things.

[MD] Can you say more about that?

[Rose] Because I think I've had like a lot more intellectual attractions to people than physical attractions to people. And those intellectual attractions and being in kind of assault situations because I am not actually sexually attracted to these people and I do not know how else to maintain that bond of mental attraction, but then getting to a space right at the beginning of a sexual encounter when you're like, 'Fuck no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Nope, this is wrong. Oh, gross, gross, gross, gross.' And having that keep happening, there's kind of got to be a reason. It's not just that other people suck. It's kind of like, 'Oh, it's because you think that I want this because we are this close. But actually, I do not, because I am not attracted to you.' And so I realized that I have to start going through this process where I am like, 'Okay, so I am intellectually attracted to this person. It's a nice thought exercise, but am I physically attracted to them or just intellectually attracted to them?' I've got to separate those and intellectual attractions got to stay in the friendzone. I've actually only been physically attracted to two people in my entire life.

[MD] And how did you figure that out?

[Rose] Partners have pointed this out to me multiple times. Then I also like, I can't remember which podcast, but somebody just came out with a book called Ace.

[MD] Oh, yeah, it was an Unladylike interview.

[Rose] And I was like, Okay, well, I mean listening to her talk, maybe I should kind of look this up. And so then I started using the interwebs. Just like everybody else uses the interwebs to learn about themselves. And I started reading about stuff. And I was like, oh, okay, yep, yep, this is, this is where I am. Here I am.

[MD] So how did you feel when you found, like, a space that you identified with?

[Rose] It's nice to have a word for an experience and a way of explaining it, and it's not like I am gonna, you know, well, I guess I am right now, but it's not like this is a thing that I am really gonna have to advocate for and everyone's gonna have to recognize and accept that I am. Well, I mean, it does put me in the queer category, but I am not going to be like, 'Look at me. This is my experience.' But it's like, I am not the only person and I am not weird. And like there's a word for

me, which is nice. Yeah, it's like poststructuralism there's got to be a word for you to exist.

Since this interview, I have begun to insert my experiences with asexuality into casual conversation, especially with my parents and friends, and now into this dissertation. I consciously choose who I want to talk about asexuality with and only share with those people.

Ginny, similarly, inserts her bi/pansexual identity into conversations rather than formally coming out to people.

I never really struggled with the fact of coming out as bi. I do not think I ever really came out as not straight necessarily. I think it was just something that I started making comments more about different types of people. And so people slowly started to realize like, "Oh, she's interested in more than one gender." Yeah, not really something that I ever consciously had - a coming-out moment or anything like that.

In our interview, she did not specify with whom she has shared her interest in all genders of people, except for sharing it with her parents. Perhaps by casually mentioning her attractions, Ginny is filtering people out based on who acknowledges her pansexuality and who doesn't seem to understand what she is talking about.

Gabi, however, has purposefully not come out to her parents as bisexual.

Recalling the boundaries that they have maintained around heterosexuality and race, Gabi seems to have made the choice not to push against those boundaries unless she is in a long-term relationship with a woman.

I never really talk about it with my family and it was never something that mattered. I know that my family would not hate me or disown me or anything like that. But my mom would probably be sad for no reason. Probably more so if I told her that I was lesbian, but it's just not worth talking about until I have someone that makes it necessary. It just doesn't really matter.

Gabi chooses to keep her bisexual identity hidden from her family to avoid their sadness. In some ways, this signifies that her family has succeeded in maintaining sexual identity boundaries to the point where she does not express her sexual identity in spaces with them.

Similar to Ginny and Gabi, Esther has not officially come out as bisexual in public. Her friends all know, but due to the school environment, she does not want certain teachers or classmates to know.

My friends, we're all out to each other and really fine expressing ourselves the way we want to, but also sometimes get comments like, "You're gay." My friends will make jokes, we will call each other faggots to make fun of the other people to almost take power away from that word again. But when other people say that, it still sucks really bad. And so some of us, we're not really that comfortable talking about it. There are people who I do not bring it up around because it's like, "I know you're not for this and I do not want to have to deal with not feeling okay around you." So we just do not talk about it. But I feel like if they knew how many people that there were in the school who identified, they would be more open-minded maybe. Or they'll just be asses.

In our interview, Esther described making a conscious choice to hide her sexuality from people who maintain boundaries around heterosexuality because she knows that she needs to maintain relationships with them at school. Some of her friends are uncomfortable talking about bisexuality at all as a result of name-calling and other boundary maintenance behaviors. Rather than being in conflict and feeling uncomfortable with those people, Esther chooses not to disclose her sexual identity with them.

My chemistry teacher said, "hate speech does not hurt people." He said those words. They came out of his mouth. And my gay classmate and I just looked at each other. We're like, "Really? Yes, it does." He goes, "Not physically." We did not say anything because my chemistry teacher doesn't know and I do not fancy him knowing. Like, really? Okay. Tell that to the parents, the siblings, the friends of the numerous LGBT people who have taken their lives because they've been outed without them knowing. They've been bullied because they're gay. They've

been told that they're going to hell because they're gay. Hate speech hurts people. And I think people need to understand that because I think words can hurt a lot.

Esther's chemistry teacher actively maintains the boundaries around who should be protected, saying that people who are exposed to hate speech, generally LGBTQIA+* folks, women trying to speak up, and people of color, are not hurt by White, heterosexual, male words. Esther, as a bisexual, feminist, environmental advocate, and her gay classmate have both been exposed to and hurt by the hate speech that their teacher defends. As such, his boundary maintenance behaviors unconsciously place Esther and her classmate outside of the boundaries, reinforcing Esther's choice to withhold information from him about her sexual identity.

Intersections of Race, Gender, and Sexuality

In this section, I focus on how Esther, Ginny, and Gabi address privilege and Whiteness. I introduce how Ginny and Gabi used the term "privilege" when talking about their race, gender, and sexual identities. Then, I look at two different ways that participants confront their Whiteness.

Understandings of 'Privilege'

Ginny and Gabi both use the word 'privilege' when referring to aspects of their gender, sexual, and racial identities. Gabi discusses privilege in terms of her placement as a White person in a society where White is the default identity.

[Rose] So what are your earliest memories related to your racial, gender, and sexual identities?

[Gabi] I honestly think it's something I've had the privilege to not think about. I do not really think I thought about race... because in my world White was the default, right? I never really thought about race because it never mattered too much I think until probably middle school when I just started to realize that people acted differently because of the environments that they grew up in. And I

think that was probably like the first time I started thinking about it in that way rather than this person looks different than me. And I probably thought about Jewish identity being different more than anything.

Gabi recognizes that racial power dynamics in the US are skewed towards Whiteness, thus making White the default and giving her and other White people the privilege of not thinking about race. However, rather than remaining in a mental space where racial identities do not matter, Gabi became conscious of racial identities and expressions in relation to home environments, behavior at school, and opportunities available to people of different races.

Ginny sees her privilege in the freedom that her parents gave her to express her gender and sexuality as she pleased.

I've always been fairly free of gender expression, which definitely I recognize there's a privileged position being a woman with that. But like my parents never really put me into a specific box as far as female conformity goes.

My understanding of this quote is twofold. First, Ginny recognizes that women's families often maintain boundaries around their gender expressions, which was not true of her upbringing. Second, identifying as a woman, using she/her pronouns, and presenting gender-neutral expression holds more privilege in US society than using they/them pronouns, identifying as non-binary or agender, and presenting gender-neutral expression. Occupying the former category, Ginny is privileged in her cis-gender identity and engaging in gender-neutral expressions by choice.

Becoming Aware of Whiteness

In response to the question "How do you identify yourself today?" only Gabi listed herself as White. During some of the interviews, I modeled what I was looking for by saying, "I am identifying as a cisgender, asexual, European White woman today, how

are you identifying?” but when my White friend asked me in my own interview, I failed to list my race. Ginny and Esther did the same.

Even though none of us foreground our Whiteness, Gabi and I have slightly different ways of talking about race than Ginny and Esther throughout our interviews. I recall the feeling of being the “other” with fewer privileges in society as a US citizen living in China and working within a Chinese university.

In China, I thought about Whiteness and being White all the time, because it's where I experienced a lot of racism. People would laugh at me all the time and criticize me in Chinese and I could understand them even though they did not think that I did. And I had three different men come and start jerking off near me. And I had to kind of just get up and leave. And then, Chinese policy is kind of nationalistic and anti-immigrant. And so none of my work counted as my own work and somebody else always signed off on it. And textbooks that I wrote are not authored by me. They were authored by a co-author who got that credit and signed off on them. And I was paid less, like everything kind of was skewed towards Chinese people in the area. And so that was a really interesting experience. And I hope that it has kind of helped me to empathize more with the fact that the US is structured in the same way, but it's structured in the same way for White people. And I am a White person.

I've always had a conflicted identity, stuck between feeling comfortable and existing easily in Chinese linguistic and cultural spaces and having the privileges of being a White US citizen. I used to call it trans-cultural, experiencing a feeling of dysphoria related to my skin color, the identities it forces on me, and the fact that I can never be Chinese. It was only on returning to the US at the age of 26 that I realized I do not get to choose my racial identity and expressing the parts of Chinese and Tibetan culture that I learned to embody is now seen as cultural appropriation by some people. I live in the borderlands.

Similarly, Gabi began to feel more conflicted about expressing her Jewish identity when she moved to Minnesota.

I never felt like I couldn't very strongly talk about being Jewish because I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood and my schools were really Jewish. And even in college, that was kind of still the case, or no one cared. And that was my way of maybe feeling different. Except moving here, there are a lot less Jewish people. And even when I talk about being Jewish or want to make a joke, even with other Jewish people, I feel like I can't make jokes. Maybe I shouldn't be making stereotyping jokes, but it was something that I always felt like I could use as a way of humor to identify myself and help me talk to other people like me. But I felt like those jokes always fell flat or made other people uncomfortable here. And that was weird to me. But it's only with other White people. I think it's because, in today's day and age, we're less comfortable talking about race and it's something people are scared to face, particularly if they have grown up in an area that's not very diverse.

Growing up in Jewish spaces, Gabi rarely felt boundaries around expressing her Jewish identity. However, she found that not only were there fewer Jewish people in Minnesota but White people, in general, were uncomfortable talking about Jewish culture, thus placing boundaries around Gabi's ethnic identity.

Gabi and I both ran into boundaries around what White people in US society saw as appropriate expressions of Whiteness. I stepped back from expressing the parts of myself that might be misconstrued as cultural appropriation and Gabi stepped back from making jokes about her Jewish identity to fit within the boundaries maintained by White Minnesotans.

Lack of Engagement with Whiteness

Esther and Ginny both grew up in fairly White areas. As discussed previously, Esther went to school at a larger, more diverse, school for a time, but it was still in a predominantly White area. Outside of discussing racist jokes and comments made by her classmates, Esther did not engage with her Whiteness during our interview. Ginny, similarly, describes the lack of racial diversity in her school,

I grew up in a pretty cookie-cutter, White suburb. My friend group was, for the area, particularly diverse, but that meant I had like one Spanish friend whose parents were from Spain, not just Spanish speaking. And I think one or two of my close friends were black. But my school was like 700 people and I can count between my two hands how many like people of color we had in high school. It wasn't a lot. So I grew up in a predominantly White area.

When talking about racial identities throughout these interviews, Esther and Ginny mostly talked about building awareness, rather than their own experiences with Whiteness. They mention being exposed to People of Color and being conscious of racialized jokes, but rarely talk about how that impacts their experiences as White people. I hypothesize that not having brushed against the boundaries of White identity expressions, Esther and Ginny have not yet been forced to critically interrogate their experiences as White people. Gabi and I, on the other hand, have encountered boundaries around our racial identities that have caused us to recognize, and potentially renegotiate, our relationships with Whiteness.

On Being White, Cisgender, Queer Women

As White, cisgender, queer women, Esther, Ginny, Gabi, and I occupy a space of privilege and choice in terms of how to express our identities. In terms of gender, we appear to fit the cis-normative assumptions of occupying White bodies that match our gender identities. By our mere positioning as cisgender White individuals, we are granted freedom to play with masculine or androgynous gender expressions. This freedom is not always available to cisgender individuals of Color whose gender expressions are often stereotyped and sexualized by the White gaze (Bettie, 2014; Kendall, 2012; Lee, 2009).

Due to our positioning as White, cisgender women, we are often assumed to be straight. Esther, Ginny, and Gabi discuss experimenting with gender expressions to signal their queer sexual identities. We enact agency not only through our masculine and

androgynous gender expressions but also through our privileged choices to hide or reveal our queer identities. I consider the choice to hide or reveal identities as a privilege because racial and gender identities are often expressed externally and can only be hidden at the expense of the individual. To be at peace staying in the closet when we choose to do so is a privilege.

We benefit from White privilege in many aspects of our lives, including the freedoms that we have in our gender and sexual identity expressions. Throughout our interviews, we rarely interrogate our Whiteness and are only somewhat conscious of it until our versions of Whiteness are challenged.

Of course, we encounter boundaries around our identity possibilities, mainly pertaining to gender and sexual identities. For instance, there are still fewer information sources about asexuality, bisexuality, and pansexuality, than there are about how to be lesbian or gay. The lack of information means that we have fewer role models or examples of how to be White, cisgender, queer women. As White, cisgender individuals, we are assumed to be straight and must change our gender expressions if we choose to be seen as queer. It is the gaps between our appearances and our realities that place us in the borderlands where we negotiate our hidden identities in a privileged White environment at the intersections of sexism and heteronormativity.

Chapter 5: Ways of Being an Asian American Man

“I have become a queer mixture of the East and the West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere.” -Jawaharlal Nehru

I still dream in Chinese sometimes. People from my lives in the US and Western China often act as protagonists, all talking in Chinese. These dreams generally follow a pattern in which I am trying to solve a seemingly impossible problem without the resources that I need. In some ways, these dreams reflect the gender lessons that I was taught by Han Chinese, Dai, and Tibetan women during my years in Western China and behaviors that I picked up from watching TV shows. In my interview for this project, I reflected on these lessons in the following way:

I would say that I like got my gender education also when I was in China. It was like, “Oh, this is what girls are supposed to do or like this is what women are supposed to do.” They're supposed to like, make sure that everything is running smoothly and like do this shit. And I am still working on getting rid of that because it sucks. Yeah, it's called patriarchy. It's not necessarily something that my parents taught me as much as something that China taught me and then I realized that it worked well with my parents. And it also makes you “The Good Wife”. But I never got to be the good wife so it did not pay off in the end.

Now that I look at it, this statement comes across as both bitter and sad; I internalized patriarchal values that made it more difficult to find an equal life partnership.

Like Ginny, I grew up with fewer boundaries around gender, going to a farm school, hiking the 46 high peaks around my hometown, having to ask someone else to borrow their Barbies if I wanted to play with them. Since coming back from China, I've been trying to unlearn the habit of being the person who constantly works to make things run smoothly and serves people when it is not my responsibility to do so. I see these as

behaviors that I brought back with me. I spent my first years as an independent adult (2008-2016) immersed in Western Chinese cultures, and the lessons that I learned there deeply impacted how I see the world and potentially how I interpret the experiences of Todd and Joseph Levitt.

Introduction to Main Points and Participants

In this chapter, I will discuss the experiences of Todd and Joseph Levitt, two Asian American men. While they have different ethnic backgrounds, Todd being of Taiwanese descent and Joseph Levitt being of Vietnamese descent, many of the boundaries around their identities as Asian American men are parallel to each other. Their responses to these boundaries, however, differ significantly. In the first part of this chapter, I will explain ways that their parents, teachers, classmates, friends, and social media maintain boundaries around identity possibilities for cisgender Asian American men. The second part of this chapter will delve into Todd and Joseph Levitt's agentic responses to the boundaries that they encounter. As racial, gender, and sexual identities are constantly present and intertwined in the ways that Todd and Joseph Levitt discuss their experiences, I will analyze all three identities together.

Intersectional analysis of Todd and Joseph Levitt's experiences with boundaries around identity possibilities and agency reveals several key points. First, the boundaries around gender, sexual, and racial identities maintained by their parents are co-formed at the intersection of the immigrant experience, the Asian American experience, and cultural value systems. As such, Todd and Joseph Levitt's gender, sexual, and racial identities are inextricably linked. Second, both Todd and Joseph Levitt experience similar boundaries around gender, sexual, and racial identities at school enacted by Asian

American classmates. Third, both Todd and Joseph Levitt locate themselves between Asian and American, between masculine identities, and enact agency in ways that reflect their positioning in the borderlands.

Todd and Joseph Levitt

Todd's parents immigrated to the US from Taiwan in the late 1970s or early 1980s for his dad to attend graduate school. Todd grew up in the Bay Area of California, where he attended a private K-8 school that served almost only Asian American students. His public high school student body was at least half Asian American as well. Being from the Bay Area, Todd did not experience the minoritization of Asian Americans until moving to Minnesota. As a queer, cisgender, Asian American man, Todd shifts his identity expressions to blend in and center the aspects of his identity that need the most politicization in certain spaces.

Joseph Levitt's parents moved to the US from Vietnam when they were in their early 20s. He describes his household growing up as "kind of a mixed bag of trying to hold on to Vietnamese cultures, but also having American culture influence us at every turn, especially in the public schools." When asked about his identities, Joseph Levitt responded:

In terms of race, I would say I am Asian American. I do not entirely know what that means. But I hold on to some Vietnamese traditions and I will have plans to hold on to something these traditions and hope to pass those down. But I am very much not Vietnamese at the same time. That's the American portion, I mean. Sexuality-wise, straight. Gender, Male.

As a straight, cisgender, Asian American man from Minnesota, Joseph Levitt's experiences of his identities and his responses to barriers around possible identities differ significantly from those of Todd.

Boundaries Around the Asian American Man

Both Todd and Joseph Levitt received gendered and racialized lessons from their parents, teachers, and classmates as to identity possibilities for Asian American men. For Todd, lessons on queer identity possibilities came from media and social media. In this section, I will analyze Todd and Joseph Levitt's experiences with other people maintaining boundaries around their identities within their families, school spaces, and social media.

Lessons from Parents on How to be Asian American Men

As previously mentioned, Todd and Joseph Levitt both received messages from their parents on how to be Asian American men. While Todd was taught to follow a proven path towards success in a system that was skewed against Asian Americans, Joseph Levitt was encouraged to maintain a clear Vietnamese identity. Lessons about masculinity and sexuality were less obvious but pointed toward enacting forms of hegemonic masculinity and building families.

When asked what cultural values, beliefs, or ideals that influence his identities were passed on to him and by whom, Todd responded:

Oh, well, I feel like that's controversial because I find it very hard to separate what is cultural versus what is my parents passing on their values that are not necessarily cultural...I mean, there's definitely a notion of earning your way into whatever success, right? Very much like a combination of Model Minority plus the American Dream. Being lazy was capital B bad. I think one of the things that...Once again, I do not know if this is cultural. There's something like perfectionism that may or may not be tied to saving face, Do not screw up because it'll look bad, right? And also, if you do not want to look bad, you do not want people to perceive some sort of flaw then just do not do those flaws. Just do everything correctly and you do not have to worry about what people think, you know? Um, the cultural values... there's definitely what we call ancestral respect or whatever, where I feel like even though I do not have the greatest relationship

with my parents and I feel like a lot of other folks are thinking a similar thing, you're still gonna take care of your parents when they get older or that's still on the table when other folks would be like, 'No, you have a really shit relationship. Why do you owe that to them?' It's still something that's very ingrained in me. I feel like this is an immigrant thing instead of a cultural thing, there's this inability to take risks. I feel like there's something about the trope about 'You're gonna be like a doctor or a lawyer or an engineer or whatever.' I think people, at a surface level, interpret that as narrow-mindedness or whatever, but I feel like it's essentially saying 'Hey, we're in this like foreign-ass country and we know that there are set ways to success. You're gonna be at a disadvantage because you're not culturally acclimated or assimilated into this country.' I think my parents would be a lot less willing than other parents to say it's called discrimination or racism, but there's some notion of that where they feel like if you play the game for things that are not so 'subjective' in their eyes, then that's the thing that you need to do, right? There's something about risk there both in terms of careers and other things, like what are the things that you are the most sure about where you can eliminate uncertainty because there's something about risk and not being able to afford that if you're an immigrant.

Todd discusses how his parents instilled in him a combination of traditional Taiwanese cultural values, such as filial piety and caring for parents as they age, and beliefs related to success of immigrants in the US. These two sets of beliefs seem to harmonize in Todd's understanding of what it means to be Asian American. He clearly expresses how Asian Americans have identified pathways to success in a discriminatory system and parents encourage their children to pursue stable careers. Todd has embodied some of these lessons in his choice to earn a degree in Computer Science and work in that field, thus following the path towards the American Dream laid out for him by his parents.

In contrast to Todd's experience growing up in California where he interacted with many Asian Americans, Joseph Levitt describes the friction of being both Vietnamese and not Vietnamese through his discussion of cultural lessons taught by his parents. Growing up in Minnesota, he was surrounded by fewer Asian American or specifically Vietnamese American friends than Todd interacted with in the Bay Area.

Rather than focusing on integration, as Todd's family did in order to pursue the American Dream, Joseph Levitt's parents emphasized maintaining Vietnamese culture.

There were a couple of times where me and my parents would sort of butt heads on expectations of what a person should be doing, I guess. For example, growing up in a Vietnamese house, they expected that kids were always super respectful. You go over to an elder's house and first thing you go up to your elder, bow, and you say this thing. And if you do not, that is tantamount sacrilegious. And, you know, same if you invite your friends over. If they do not come in and do the thing [bow] to your parents, sacrilegious. They're not allowed back in the house anymore. So we had these issues of expectations that were held that they would try to teach you that you just did not have in American culture. I guess that was kind of some tension, some pain points there because you just did not know, being an Asian American you subscribed to both sorts of identity. If you do not know which one to hold on to, you do not know which one to practice. Sometimes you push back and be like, 'Dad, that's just not the way you do it here.' And then and then the stick comes out and you're like, 'Oh, I fucked up.' But I understand that was just them trying to hold on to their identity. But I am very much that but also not that, so I couldn't quite take all the lessons they gave to me and let that be who I was. So that was that in terms of race. Never talked to me about gender, although I guess I would just feel it all the time. I tried to mimic my dad's sort of personality, being the only men in the house. And, you know, we never talk about sexuality. Never ever.

As Joseph Levitt describes, his parents expected people of all cultures to enact Vietnamese traditions in their household. On one hand, this potentially placed boundaries around who Joseph Levitt felt he could be friends with, as he may not have felt comfortable teaching friends of different backgrounds about Vietnamese traditions. On the other hand, this expectation that he should embody Vietnamese traditions and values may have placed limitations on how comfortable he could feel occupying both Vietnamese and mainstream US spaces.

Similar to Taiwanese values mentioned by Todd, Joseph Levitt specifically describes being committed to making offerings to his parents after they die. This tradition reflects the same filial piety as Todd's future responsibility for his parents' care. Despite both of these Asian American men mentioning friction between themselves and their

parents, they remain within the cultural boundaries about caring for their elders both in life and after death.

It's sort of a homage to them at this point, where there are just some practices where I know they would be sad if I did not partake and participate in them. And so I will continue to perpetuate them. They're not necessarily things that I would ask my kids to participate in. For example, altar and incense burning, are you familiar with this? With your dead relatives, you have an altar in your house that you pray to every day, burn money at, and put fresh fruit on, so they can eat it in the afterlife. This is all nonsense to me, but this is what my parents are doing for their parents. And I know that's something they would want for us to do for them. So I would definitely continue to so. That really ties me to a Vietnamese tradition. Food is there. But as far as Vietnamese traditions on how to interact with people, I do not care to subscribe to those things. It's a very, very, misogynistic culture still, it's just very Vietnamese. But it's also just doesn't have to be.

Joseph Levitt is clearly both Vietnamese in terms of certain traditions that he will carry on for his parents and not Vietnamese in the ways that he chooses to step away from the misogyny integrated into cultural ways of interacting. At the time of this interview, he describes choosing which aspects of Vietnamese culture to hold on to and which parts to let go of, thus defining the boundaries of his own Vietnamese and masculine identities. In choosing his own mix of Vietnamese-ness and Americanness, Joseph Levitt finds himself in the borderlands between the two.

While Todd's parents mainly laid out the boundaries around filial piety and paths towards success for Asian Americans, they also provided small snippets of information on their expectations of Todd as an Asian American man. "There's definitely steering towards masculinity. Like whatever the phrase is in Mandarin for 'man up' or 'stop complaining' or whatever." Todd describes how his parents taught him that men should be stoic and keep their emotional and physical discomfort to themselves. They also maintain boundaries around heterosexuality through their expectations of his future family. "I do not think they said too much about sexuality. They just say 'Oh, we want

grandkids' and I kind of just laugh." Notably, Todd never mentioned coming out to his parents during our interview, indicating to me that this may be an aspect of his identity that he has chosen to hide from them as a way of "saving face" and "doing everything correctly" to fulfill the Model Minority stereotype.

Joseph Levitt's hints of familial lessons about masculinity often revolve around violence, including his mention of his father getting a stick when he questioned Vietnamese traditions. Joseph Levitt often describes his father's masculinity as a patriarchal form that he dislikes and associates with a wider-spread misogyny that he sees in Vietnamese culture.

Both Todd and Joseph Levitt also receive lessons from their parents on differences between Asian American men and people with other racial identities. For instance, Todd recalls,

For race, I do not know that my parents really had that much to say about Whiteness but there are definitely snide comments about blackness, right? I do not remember anything from earlier on but my parents have definitely said things like, "Oh, watch out for your wallet if taking public transit or a black person might try to steal it" or something like that, you know.

Todd's parents taught him to see Black people as robbers, drawing boundaries around Asian American versus Black behavioral stereotypes. Adopting anti-Blackness plays into the framing of Asian Americans as the Model Minority due to their hard work to attain the American Dream, connoting that Black Americans could also succeed but are merely lazy (Lee, 2009). This framing is structured to benefit White people by highlighting the success of people who attain the American Dream within the constraints of structural racism, thus downplaying the effects of structural racism on all people of color (Lee, 2009).

For Joseph Levitt, the “tension” and “pain points” around his Vietnamese and American identities become clear in this example in which he is forced to physically distance himself from potential American friends in the neighborhood.

You grew up in a neighborhood where it's very easy to just step outside and run out to your friend's place and hang out. And that's just like a very American thing to do, I guess. In Vietnamese culture, my parents were like, ‘No, you can't be hanging out with those people. They're not, you know, they're White.’ Essentially, they're gonna corrupt you. They do not have the same culture as you and I am like, ‘Okay, sure,’ you know, you have to do what your parents say. So I never really got to experience that part of childhood, I guess.

Rather than supporting assimilation into White spaces as Todd described, Joseph Levitt’s parents drew boundaries around what it meant to be Vietnamese in opposition to the difference and cultural “corruption” that could occur from associating with White American friends. This distancing from Whiteness is interesting in that it seems to run opposite to the Model Minority myth, which encourages interactions with White people and distancing from People of Color (Lee, 2009).

School as a Space for Defining Boundaries

Todd and Joseph Levitt had notably different experiences at school. Todd attended a majority Asian American school through eighth grade and then moved to a high school with a strong Asian American presence. Joseph Levitt, however, attended predominantly White schools with few Asian American students. I believe that these differences in school demographics may have contributed to Todd and Joseph Levitt’s differing relationships with their cisgender, male, Asian American identities. This section will address how Todd and Joseph Levitt experienced the Model Minority stereotype at school, how friends and student hierarchies defined boundaries around Asian and

masculine identity possibilities, and how college became a space for redefining boundaries around how to be an Asian American cisgender man.

As Todd alluded to in his discussion of lessons from his parents, he believed deeply in the Model Minority stereotype during his primary and secondary schooling. This may have been at least in part because he had very few associations with White people or People of Color outside of Asian American communities and, thus, had very few points of comparison.

So in elementary-middle school, I fucking ate that model minority stereotype. You know you fucking believe that Asians are smart period. But also I just wasn't around a lot of White people. Also, I am noticing that I am mentioning two among many races because I literally did not know any black folks or Hispanic folks or native folks up until college I think.

While Todd's parents instilled him with some version of the Model Minority stereotype, it may also be that assumptions about Asian Americans being talented learners were embedded in the school curriculum, student hierarchies, and ways that teachers interacted with students.

Unlike Todd, Joseph Levitt attended predominantly White public schools in an area where most Asian students were either refugees or the children of refugees. Asian classmates in Joseph Levitt's school were more similar to the New Wave Asians described by Lee (2009), rejecting schooling and prioritizing breakdancing and street racing over education, thus conforming to and perpetuating boundaries that educators and broader society placed on them. Taking AP classes, Joseph Levitt stood out from and was ostracized by his Asian classmates. He recalls when he first became racially conscious and had to begin making choices about how to express his Asian identity in high school:

As for race, probably not until the start of high school. I think that's when things started to become cliquey. And people sort of grouped up into like people and then there was the question, where would I eat my lunch? You know, was it at the Asian table, or was it with my friends in my AP classes? Because Asians... none of the other Asians were in AP. That's just not what Asians did.

He faced barriers around what it meant to be Asian maintained by his Asian classmates and simultaneously had to choose between pursuing AP classes or being accepted as Asian. He recalls that his family placed more value on education than the families of his Asian contemporaries, thus pushing him toward enacting what might be seen as Model Minority behaviors, while his classmates rebelled against that stereotype.

As Asian American students who were academically-oriented, Todd and Joseph Levitt had very different experiences. In Todd's schools, it was assumed that Asian American students would be academic high achievers, thus perpetuating the Model Minority stereotype. In Joseph Levitt's school, however, his interest in school made him an outlier among Asian American students who focused more on breakdancing and street racing than on education. Therefore, one could say that Joseph Levitt's experience is a counternarrative to the Model Minority stereotype in which he faced rejection for engaging in school.

In fact, Joseph Levitt's Asian classmates drew boundaries around what it meant to be Asian, defining academic interests as White. His labeling as a White Asian eventually led to his exclusion from his Asian friend group.

Just struggles in high school when you're dealing with your racial identity, you know, figuring out which clique you go with and constantly being weirdly bombarded by the Asian community that you know because they were your friends in middle school. In elementary school, they were the people you kind of gravitate towards. You gravitate towards like people. And then all of a sudden, in high school, when they start to think that they get to define things. You try to hang out with them. They start to put up these boundaries and barriers like, 'Well,

we do not actually get along anymore. You're like a White Asian person now. You're not into breakdancing, street racing, and all the things.' And I am like, 'Okay. That's fine.' So just sorts of things like that, where you just kind of have to decide which boundaries you're part of, which ones you want to knock down, which ones are worth knocking down.

As he described, Joseph Levitt found himself in a position in which his former friends defined and maintained boundaries around Asian identity expression that did not match his own version of Asianness.

While Joseph Levitt seemed to have only two options, to develop his identities within the parameters set out by his Asian classmates or to be a White Asian, Todd's time at school was steeped with information on identity possibilities for young Asian American men from both hidden and formal curricula. Surrounded by Asian American students in his K-8 private school, Todd recalled how his classmates grouped each other by color.

I mean we were awful as kids obviously and because our school was entirely Asian American, we divided up based on color. I mean color as in if you were paler. We played basketball where you did "Chinese against Indians" even though not everyone was Chinese or Indian. It was based on ...Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan people looked Indian or looked vaguely more brown, so they'd be put on the Indian side. If you were paler, whether it's like Southeast Asian or like East Asian, you'd be put on like the Chinese side. So there was some vague notion about like, I do not even know what the phrase is because it's not like color, but it's essentially color.

In a predominantly Asian American setting, Todd's classmates identified differences based on skin tone, illustrating how even within a space that might appear to be homogenous based on general racial classifications, young people found ways to differentiate themselves. While Todd does not directly discuss colorism among Asian Americans in other contexts, students may have been enacting boundaries around color and culture that they saw maintained in other spaces in their lives, thus perpetuating

colorism in schooling. This form of colorism may have maintained boundaries around how these individuals have interacted with Asian Americans of different skin tones over time, reinforcing divisions in the wider Asian American community and making unified political action more difficult.

Todd's public high school was still majority Asian American but had more White students than his previous school. Here, the students were differentiated by Asian American and White, rather than different shades of skin tone. Todd describes an academic hierarchy that sits in complete opposition to Joseph Levitt's experiences, Asian as high achieving, and White as obtaining lower grades.

This became more apparent in high school, Asian American culture was the dominant culture in some ways, at least for academics. You would use the phrases Asian and White to describe how you're doing academically. If you were not getting straight A's, you'd make some comment about your own Whiteness. And like this is not just the Asian American kids, this is the White kids as well who'd make some joke about how they're like yellow on the inside if they're taking AP classes. And I feel like that's definitely a product of being in that part of the country. But that being said, there are parts of it where clearly there's still something lacking because we were still not taught our history, you know? Even with a majority Asian American student population, Asian American folks on the school board, etc. there were no ethnic studies classes, they still do not have ethnic studies classes. The US history classes were clearly lacking, the world history classes were clearly lacking, etc... There's still a racial hierarchy for everything else not academic. The cool kids were almost the same as your stereotypical high school. They'd be kind of jockey you know, played football or hung out with the football kids. And that was the "in-group". There's still some sort of racial hierarchy for social interactions or relationships that was standard instead of our weird academic hierarchy.

Todd's description of the two hierarchies – academic and social – illustrates yet another way that the Model Minority stereotype was integrated into the hidden curricula of his high school education. Asian American students were expected to be academic achievers to the point where academic success was synonymous with being Asian. However, popularity was still based on Whiteness and athleticism.

While the vast majority of Todd's classmates throughout primary and secondary school were Asian American, the teachers were predominantly White women. Todd alludes to his own questions about whether these educators approached their students within the framework of the Model Minority stereotype, but clearly remembers not being taught Asian American histories or cultures.

[Todd] Well, it's a private school with no standards or no national or state standards. We definitely did not talk about race. I do not remember what we learned in history class. One of the things I do wonder is, and I still wonder about that today is the demographics of the staff did not match up with the demographics of the students. The staff was not literally like 98% Asian American. And I do not know if they treated us a certain way because of whatever stereotypes they had about our families, our cultures and that's still something very difficult for me to tease or understand. But that being said, we weren't taught our history. If you're at a school that's 98% Asian American and you do not know about immigration acts that literally brought your parents to this country, that's disappointing, to say the least. I do not think we celebrated cultural holidays either. Shoot...no...I am pausing because I learned about Diwali but I do not know if that's from students or from teachers. You know what, maybe classrooms did that? I am not sure.

I did have teachers who are men. My third-grade teacher was a dude. And then yeah, a couple of other men teachers in middle school. They're all White. Yeah, I do not really know what to think for elementary and middle school.

[RH] Did male teachers seem like role models?

[Todd] Ah, well, the third-grade one had anger issues. So nobody really wanted to be like him. Yeah, he flipped over desks when he got really angry. One of the teachers from middle school the girls were kind of wary of. They were like, he's kind of a pedo. Right, using language from the way we describe things in sixth, and seventh, and eighth grade. Yeah, obviously as a twelve-year-old I did not know better and at this point, I do not know better either. Another teacher was this elderly, very nice man; we only discovered after he passed away that he was a pastor or something. He was a very good teacher. Maybe people loved his class and enjoy learning, but if you're like a 12-year-old Asian boy and there's this like elderly White man in his seventies, you do not really make that connection. He's just like an old grandpa.

Todd highlights the imbalance between White teachers and Asian American students and the lack of Asian American men to act as role models throughout his K-12 education. The silence around race, Asian American history, and cultural traditions in the school's

curriculum may indicate assimilationist messages embedded within the hidden curriculum. Rather than highlighting what makes Asian American experiences in the US unique, Todd's schools seem to disregard parts of their students' lives thus teaching them that their experiences are not significant.

This was particularly true for Asian American boys at the school, who saw neither Asian American nor positive masculine representation. The violence enacted by his third-grade teacher and the sexual threat of the middle school teacher drove students away from them. Todd recalls that only one of his few White, male teachers was a very good teacher, but his age and Whiteness positioned him as an "old grandpa" rather than a role model. Perhaps this lack of positive Asian American male role models contributed to Todd's eventual rejection of masculinity.

Among the absences at his school, Todd also notices an absence of girls in advanced STEM classes. Within the Asian American academic hierarchy, boys were more likely to take STEM classes.

I generally thought of school, schooling as a very academic thing. So that's where I am going today. It was very apparent that the advanced STEM classes were heavily Asian American and they're also heavily boys. We obviously did not have the knowledge to be able to say okay, what is stereotype threat and stereotype promise? What are gender norms and expectations of boys and girls? It's just like, "Oh shit, why is this class all guys?" And if you're a girl in 10th grade and you're thinking about taking AP Physics and you know that this year's AP physics class has one girl, why the fuck would you take it next year, right? So none of us recognized the causes of gender disparities but we definitely noticed them for academic classes.

Todd attributes this phenomenon to a vicious cycle in which girls did not see other girls taking STEM classes and thus chose not to take them either, leading to a perpetual lack of female representation in STEM. This prevalence of Asian American boys in STEM may

also have placed boundaries around Asian American masculinity, suggesting that men should pursue STEM fields and that it was abnormal for women to do the same.

While Todd mainly encountered gender lessons through absences – an absence of male role models and female students in STEM - Joseph Levitt received clear gender lessons from classmates at school. He recalls a marked moment in kindergarten where he was taught that having painted nails was beyond the boundaries for boys.

There was this one moment in kindergarten where, thinking back on it, it upsets me now that this person did this, but it makes sense. My mom was a nail salonist and so she was in training, and she would practice on us, on me and my sister. One time she painted my nails and I went to school with my nails painted. There was a girl that was just like, 'What are you doing? You can't paint your nails. That's what girls do.' And I was like, oh, and then I felt very embarrassed. I was like, 'Oh, you're right, this is weird.' And I hid my hands in my pockets the rest of the day. Thinking back on it, I am like, that's dumb. But yeah, I guess for gender it starts off like that. There are these outside forces that tell you who you are, and then you eventually have to decide for yourself that that's just not the way it should be.

Simple comments, like the one made by this girl, influenced how Joseph Levitt could move through the world by observing when he had transgressed boundaries around masculine possibilities.

As Joseph Levitt shifted away from his Asian American friends and towards White friends in his AP classes, the types of boundaries that he encountered shifted away from racial identities and toward masculinities. His friends defined and maintained boundaries around masculinity that did not include dance as a masculine form of expression.

I guess it was more of just a feeling growing up, you know, being surrounded by thoughts of what masculinity was and then just completely not subscribing to it and so you yourself feel like you're not. But also, I guess there are just weird moments and vibes you get from people. Like, there was one time I made a Facebook post about a swing dance. I went over to another college to swing dance

and there were a couple of photos taken. I made a post about it on Facebook and I had a bunch of high school friends who posted me like, “Oh, man, I always knew you were such a fruit.” And that was just like an interesting point of just like, there's this identity that has these stereotypes. Why are those being forced onto a person? And just being surrounded by other people's expectations and societal on what you think for yourself. And, again, trying to.. have to break those down. So I guess they were constricting. They were back then.

Joseph Levitt remained focused on the boundaries around gender, sexual, and racial identities defined and maintained by classmates the entire interview, never mentioning any classes or teachers when reflecting on his schooling and identity development. This indicates to me that student-student interactions most deeply impacted his path toward rejecting boundaries defining his possibilities as an Asian American cis-gender straight man.

As a queer, cisgender Asian American man, Todd was provided with little information about what it meant to be queer during his primary and secondary schooling. He recalled that sexual education in middle school was marginal, to say the least, contributing to yet more absent information related to his identities. This absence of sexual education may have been due to the Mormon founder of the school and may have also been attributed to stereotypes about the asexuality of Asian men (Kendall, 2012; Lee, 2009). In high school, Todd was taught about condoms, safer sex, and masturbation but did not learn about queerness, and particularly Asian American ways of being queer, through school.

I think what I guess is still a little bit surprising looking back it's just that for a place that's as seemingly progressive as the Bay Area, at that point in time in that specific space, there is a very strong assumed heteronormativity. I did not know anyone who is not cis het until high school and with high school, it was rumors about different teachers, you know? And a couple of folks who I knew who are in GSA or talked about being queer in the school newspaper. Bay Area 2010...weird.

Sexuality education in his schools contained unspoken heteronormative messages that were reinforced by the wider community, maintaining boundaries around Todd's queer identity possibilities. The assumed heteronormativity at school and in his community served as a way to maintain boundaries around gender and sexual identity possibilities, excluding queerness.

With little information and few role models to support his sexual identity development, Todd began negotiating his sexual identity with a friend.

Coming to terms with sexuality, I made a friend and I feel like we were both kind of figuring it out together, but not really knowing. She would be telling me about how she read fanfictions. We'd shift certain characters together and that wasn't your normal hetero couple without either of us realizing that really meant anything.

By sharing in the creation of new romantic partnerships, Todd and his friend began normalizing queer identity possibilities, making them mutually available.

Todd's understanding and expression of his queerness were impacted both by the limited information and lack of role models, also by boundary maintenance behaviors enacted by himself and his high-school friends. He describes how his experiences in high school led him to enact boundary maintaining behaviors around queerness when he entered college.

Yeah, so cringy sexuality story...oh, there's a phrase for not understanding the origins or meaning of queer culture or gay culture. I remember talking to a group of folks where I was just bashing on gay culture. Being out and bashing on gay culture is like, "Oh, people just want to be flamboyant and party all the time. I am not like that, right?" Obviously, not knowing the history of the resistance behind queerness and movements and everything else and pride starting as a literal protest. So there's me remembering just either a combination of a lack of knowledge and I guess homophobia is probably the closest word, internalized homophobia, right? That was definitely a thing in college. There's this desire to fit in and not be viewed as different or be othered I think. It's hard to tie race and gender and sexuality together, but this came from hanging out with a bunch of

boys in high school who were bullies. So coming from there, I was being very wary and being very scared of being judged and wondering “What do I have to do or say or believe to make sure that I do not get ostracized?” Especially in a new environment where nobody knows one another.

Todd’s lack of exposure to the history of the queer community placed him in a situation where he differentiated himself from other queer people by putting up boundaries around what he perceived to be appropriate performances of queerness. He acknowledges that this boundary formation behavior was a result of internalized homophobia and a defense mechanism in response to the previous bullying he experienced in secondary school. He formed these boundaries to better fit in and avoid ostracization in college.

(Social) Media as a Space of Representation

Social media and other forms of media have provided both Todd and Joseph Levitt with information on available identity possibilities and affirmation of their experiences as Asian American men. Aligning closely with research on queer youth and social media, Todd has found recent media representations of queer people Asian people particularly affirming. Joseph Levitt has turned more towards discussions on the impacts of hegemonic masculinity and alternative masculine identity possibilities.

While Joseph Levitt does not discuss social media in depth, he mentions some positive aspects of sharing ideas through posts.

I don't ever use social media to post or celebrate or express myself, but the content out there on social media does provoke a lot of introspection. I guess it sort of helps me in that regard. It is reaffirming a lot of times when you see a lot of similar posts. Even though they are the same, you know, somebody else posted it. And then you read literally the same idea in another post. Just having the numbers game like, this is an idea that's out there, and everybody shares it is really I think empowering, because if everyone's saying the same thing you don't feel alone or left out in feeling the same, or thinking the same idea. I think people should continue to post in that way, because it does help and it's powerful in

numbers. So, being reaffirmed by hearing other people's stories all the time allows me to be more confident and express myself in person on those identities.

In other words, Joseph Levitt finds that when he comes across the same ideas shared by multiple people, it reaffirms his own understandings of certain identities and specific social issues. He tends to focus on posts about masculinities and racialized experiences. As such, social media serves as a tool to affirm his identities.

In terms of queerness, Todd initially found information in media and social media. He recalls how other friends learned about queerness on Tumblr, but he found representation from Glee.

Yeah, I feel like sexuality is kind of a shit show for me. I feel like a lot of my friends discovered queerness through Tumblr. And I missed out on that train because my Tumblr was just following my other friends Tumblrs. I feel like I got some representation from Glee even though the show at this point is kind of problematic in terms of how tropey it was, but you know for its time - 2009 2010 2011- you're like holy crap, they had folks with disabilities on that show, they had queer folks on that show, they had queer people of color on the show, you know, it's hard to pinpoint the dots. I am sure that played a role, you know?

Glee provided Todd with a space where he could see some aspects of his queer and Asian identities represented in a school setting, in contrast to his K-12 school settings where heteronormativity was assumed.

However, social media has also worked in some ways to reinforce dominant narratives around what it means to be a gay, cisgender man.

I am following folks who are, I guess you can call them, mainstream gay. On Instagram, there's definitely like a body norm that you want to not want to follow, but that is celebrated, right? And it's just a thing. I do not think like anyone's being intentionally malicious about it. There are just existing expectations of beauty standards. And then depending on who you follow, you'll just see examples of that and as a result of that, you feel pressure to follow or something like that.

We went on to elaborate this body norm, the celebrated White-bodied, athletic, underwear model sort of look. Writing this, I am reflecting on the influencers I follow who focus on queerness. Chella Man, who is a deaf, Asian, trans-man, is the first person who pops into my head. In 2020, there was a Calvin Klein underwear campaign of predominantly athletic-bodied transgender models, and Chella Man was among them. Thus, even within the Asian American queer community, this athletic beauty norm is maintained.

In 2020, at least two queer Asian films have become available on Netflix. Todd's pseudonym was derived from one of these films, which spoke to both Todd and me.

The Half of It is a film that came out back in May if you know of it, and then there's this film called Straight Up that I think came out between May and now. I feel like at least in the spaces I am a part of like there's still a very dominant narrative of what queerness looks like that's very White. I think times are changing now, but up until, let's say, five years ago or so there's a questioning your identity plus coming out of the closet narrative that just doesn't work for everybody. And so with The Half of It and with Straight Up, it's just they both tell very specific stories of sexuality that obviously do not encompass everybody's experiences. But it is like, hey, here is one person's experience that is being literally turned into something that is depicted on film, that I feel like I just fucking need that validation. Yeah, you know, I very often question like, "Oh, is this an okay or a good way or a proper way to do things?" and being able to point to something on-screen and be like, "Okay, I am not crazy" because someone decided to turn this into a fucking movie. It's strangely validating.

Being both Asian and queer, Todd faces interlocking racism and homophobia. To be represented in media such as movies and TV shows opens up a variety of identity possibilities that were previously beyond the boundaries maintained by media, social media, and society.

Agency through Rejection of Dominant Narratives, Self-Definition, and Activism

Joseph Levitt repeated a mantra over and over again during our interview – do I get to define it or do I let it define me? In this section, I discuss how Joseph Levitt and Todd enact agency in three different ways. First, they reject the forms of Asian American and masculine identities that are made available by their parents and classmates. Second, they pursue alternative Asian American and masculine identities in order to self-define their identities. Third, they engage in racial activism.

Rejection of Dominant Narratives and Self-definition of Identities

Joseph Levitt's responses to boundary building and maintenance around Asian American and masculine identity possibilities indicate his penchant for self-defining possible identities.

They [my parents] are a big proponent holding on to Vietnamese culture. They introduced me to that part of myself by way of language, by way of food, by way of practices, and all of that. But I guess it wasn't any one particular person, it was just kind of a system and sort of internal thought and finding out where I place myself. That has been a big proponent of where my philosophy is. I do not know how people feel about this, but relating to a racial identity is kind of this tricky balance between just sort of, do you think you fit into it? Or is it there outside of you and it defines you, rather than you being a part of it? You get to define it, right? I very much subscribe to the latter thought. I am an Asian American purely by birth. And therefore, I get to define it, more than it gets to define me...Growing up, you have a lot of pressures of what it meant to be a man, especially in the Vietnamese culture. My dad has a lot of ideas of what masculinity is that come from Vietnam. And sort of being brought up into that and then having to think, as a male, do I get to define masculinity? Or does masculinity get to define me? And eventually, I, again, subscribed to the latter and just sort of more so decided who I was. And yeah, I push myself to not subscribe to those things. So I would say I definitely do not subscribe to the general, like, I do not think many people would call me masculine. But I would disagree.

Joseph Levitt sees and reflects upon the boundaries that his parents have defined around his racial and gender identity possibilities. Rather than subscribing to their expectations

of who he will be, he actively works to form his own definitions of what it means to be Asian American and masculine.

In contrast to Joseph Levitt's self-definition, Todd has rejected the masculinity he enacted in high school but is still seeking a version of gender and sexuality that works for him. His experiences with his friends, who he describes as bullies, in high school led him to develop the ability to fit into many different sets of identity boundaries, but he has yet to find the gender and sexual identity possibilities that feel right to him. When asked if he has difficulty reconciling his identities with societal expectations he responded:

I think on a surface level not really. I think this is one of those things where I can fit a role reasonably well on a surface level. Like if you need me to be a bro then I'll be a bro, or I guess be able to pass and talk about whoever actress in whoever movie. I can talk whatever. I think beyond deeper than the surface level, there's something about still trying to figure out what version or identity for gender and sexuality work for me. I think about how in high school, I'd say my friends and I were just mean, you know? A lot of the boys, and I am gonna keep using boys that are under 18 below, but a lot of the boys were just like mean. We were bullies and name-called and picked on one another. And I feel like senior year of high school, I realize I did not like that. That was my societal notion of being a man or whatever. But there wasn't really an alternative, you know? And so I feel like I know how to reject things better than how to embrace other things. So I was like okay, I am going to drop that. I feel like from that point onwards and up until now I like hanging out mostly with women, femme, and non-binary folks. One of my friends who I talked to last week, she said, 'Men are better now' and I am like, 'I should check in.' So I know how to play the game. I have to, right? But I also know when it's not a good fit for me. I think there's either a lack of imagination on my part, my lack of role models, or whatever, or I do not think there is a model of what everyone called positive masculinity that really works with me.

Todd has enacted agency through his recognition and rejection of the forms of masculinity that he expressed with his classmates. However, this rejection has left a void that Todd has yet to fill through encountering a role model who expresses an alternative form of masculinity that matches his sense of self.

I think sexuality is hard. I am not going to use intersectional unless it's actually Kimberle Crenshaw's definition. I feel like for like queer Asian folks in the Twin Cities there's the fact that, compared to the Bay Area, we're such a minority that for Asian Americans your race takes precedence almost. So it's like sexuality...it's not like it takes a back seat but you feel like one of your identities is more present than another. I feel like sexuality for me would be very different if I had moved back to the Bay Area or something like that. There are more fucking Asian Americans around and therefore race is not present and then because there are more queer Asian Americans around because of fucking demographics I feel like there would be more spaces, more examples of ways to navigate the world, right?

Todd, like Joseph Levitt, chose not to be defined by the identity boundaries around masculinity enacted by his high school friends and classmates; however, he did not self-define either. Rather, he stepped away from masculine spaces and moved into femme and non-binary spaces while seeking a masculine identity as a cisgender man. This has left a gap between his various performances of masculinity and an actual masculine identity that works for him. After moving to Minnesota, which has less of an Asian American presence, power structures around race shifted and emphasis on his identities shifted as well. His Asian American identity became foregrounded and politicized, while his queer identity became less of a focus. With fewer queer Asian American role models than he might have had in the Bay Area, Todd is left with fewer available identity possibilities.

Joseph Levitt approached his classmates' rejection of his expressions of Asian identity in a similar way to the boundaries around Asian American and masculine identities by his parents. That is to say that he enacted agency in his choice to self-define what it means to be Asian.

In high school, I saw this a lot where I would always be called not Asian. I was a White Asian. And that was kind of weird to me, just like, 'No, I am, I get to decide.' And everyone who's saying that were other Asians saying, 'No, this is what Asians are supposed to do.' But they had just as much say as to what Asians should be doing versus me. So I guess that was a formative piece of how I look into identifying myself. Through self-reflection, I do not try to let other people define me.

Perhaps this resistance to allowing other people to define his identities is a coping mechanism developed from the exclusion from the Asian American community that he experienced at school. Perhaps it is purely a healthy way of finding his own path in a world where identity possibilities are constantly defined by outside forces. Reflecting on Joseph Levitt's choices around which parts of Vietnamese culture to embrace and which parts to let go of, it is clear to me that his identity development reflects both of these possibilities.

In contrast to Joseph Levitt's experiences of claiming Asian American identity in response to rejection from his classmates, Todd did not see himself as a person of color or politicized in any way when he went to college. There, he was introduced to, but remained separate from, political Asian American organizations.

[Todd] I feel like Asian Americans in college were kind of divided. There were those who were politicized and political. They'd be a part of campus organizing, or they'd be a part of the Asian American Student Union, or the Vietnamese Student Association, Filipino Student Association, etc. And there were folks like me who were just like, 'Why are you doing that? What's the point?' I remember legit legitimately asking one of my friends 'What are Asian American issues?' He suggested that I ask his friend who was VP or something of the Asian American Student Association. So that was the first time I was introduced to the idea that Asian Americans can be politicized. But, I totally did not get it. One of my friends in my friend group was very involved and I literally just thought of it as just her doing her Asian things and was not understanding at all. The way I describe it now to folks here who are very surprised is that I do not think I would have considered myself a person of color in college. I did not really did not think much of that phrase until people started using it here in Minnesota. The implications of that phrase, when I was first introduced to it, I felt meant you face some level of oppression which...model minority... what's oppression, right? And so I feel like even now, given whatever people's understanding of race now versus when I was in college, I'd say a lot of my Asian American friends in the Bay Area would still be like, 'I do not know if I consider myself a person of color.' So there's something interesting there where you're clearly not White, but why do you not consider yourself as a person of color and there's something about having a politicized notion of your racial background and identity that I definitely did not have in college and a lot of my friends still do not have now.

[Rose] Would you say that you have it now?

[Todd] Yeah, I like did my homework in Minnesota. Like I do not know how else to describe it. I fucking did my homework.

While he doesn't make the connection completely, Todd hints at the idea that he may have been blind to his oppression due to his acceptance of and complicity in perpetuating the Model Minority stereotype. Finding himself in many majority Asian American spaces, Todd had yet to experience explicit oppression. Rather, he was surrounded by hidden curricula that reinforced boundaries around the Model Minority stereotype. Moving to Minnesota, and thus shifting in both geographic and demographic space, Todd no longer occupied majority Asian American spaces and began to redefine his Asian American identity. Since coming to Minnesota, Todd has joined Asian American activist groups and has continued his political education through an Asian American Studies class through UC Davis that has "really sharpened my understanding of race, like capital S sharp." If I were to go back and ask Todd a follow-up question, I would ask him if his friends in the Bay Area see themselves as people of color now that they are facing the current upsurge of violence against Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Choosing Activism

Both Joseph Levitt and Todd are politically active in Minnesota, albeit in different ways. Joseph Levitt always has dollar bills handy to pass to someone looking for help through his car window or to drop in someone's collection container. He protested and then volunteered at a food distribution site during COVID-19 and right after the murder of George Floyd in 2020. He is always ready to take action, but also sees his role in addressing the needs of Communities of Color as that of an outsider.

I am an extremely community-centric person. I think that you do not get to just live in your own bubble and worry about yourself, while everything around you is happening. And so that's why I choose to engage with the community as much as I can. And I sort of just choose to stand up for issues and causes that I know hurt others, and would obviously hurt me if they were to happen to me. So I choose to take those up and it kind of manifests itself in showing up when I can. I do not really feel like most of the issues I do stand up for directly relate to me. In Minneapolis, of course, there are huge issues of oppression of black bodies that I do not exactly get to directly feel. And so it is this weird sort of space where you want to help, but since you are not a person in that community, there are things I do not feel it's my place to take a certain role in helping solve that. There's just something I can't do that they can, purely by not being part of that community, not feeling that racial identity. I guess this was most pointed in the swing community. I do not know if you were around for that when things kind of blew up in terms of race. There was an outcry from somebody in the minority community who did not feel welcome in the space. And other people who share similar experiences echoed it and kind of organized together to try to bring the community together around a conversation about it. And purely by my race, they invited me to be part of that group, even though I did not share those experiences that they had, which was kind of a bummer. It was weird for me because I wanted to support them. They were looking for more solidarity from me, but internally, I was just like, I can understand the problem and I want to be there for you, and I am there for you, but I can't say that I am there for you in the way that you want me to be. I just do not have those same experiences that you do. And that kind of made this marked point between how my race is perceived versus how other people's races are perceived. Even though I am a minority, it's still very different, you know. Problems that black bodies face are just very different from problems that Asian bodies face.

Joseph Levitt takes action on issues of anti-Blackness in the ways he can but recognizes that Asian American issues differ from those of the Black community in Minnesota. He does not, however, discuss taking action on issues that affect the Asian American communities in Minnesota. Based on Todd's activist work within Asian American communities in Minnesota, it is clear that this is a possibility, but one that Joseph Levitt does not seem to engage with. In the context of Lindy Hop, Joseph Levitt experiences a gap between what he can offer People of Color in the dance community and what they expect him to offer as a person who they see as a Person of Color. This is, perhaps, a

point of friction between his definitions of himself as American and Vietnamese and the identity possibilities defined for him by the wider community.

Todd, on the other hand, experienced the gathering of Dancers of Color from an entirely different perspective.

Whatever happened in the Lindy Hop world two years ago, I think that was the first time I was like, 'Oh shit, this is what a multiracial coalition looks like!' I do not know how much you know about what happened on the BIPOC end but an experienced dancer of color essentially invited everyone to her house on a Tuesday night to share their experiences in the Lindy Hop community. We were there from seven o'clock till midnight on a Tuesday night. People did not know one another that well. I am not gonna speak for everyone, but for me, I did not quite think about race in that way for Lindy Hop. I started Lindy Hopping in the Bay Area where at least half of the folks there were Asian American, that's how the Bay Area works. But I was like, 'Wait, shoot, this is a multiracial coalition where we're gonna try to find what we have in common and literally try to piece together what like a racialized experience of Lindy Hop is like, understanding that gender and colorism, etc, still affect this very diverse group.' So that was like...I can't pinpoint how that made me think, it was definitely a moment, you know?

Todd recognized that his experiences were different from other members of the multiracial dance coalition, but also saw that his voice was equally valid in the process of establishing what a racialized experience of Lindy Hop looks like. Perhaps his direct involvement with Asian American activism in Minnesota has allowed Todd to see himself as walking among rather than walking beside People of Color in a way that Joseph Levitt does not.

On Being a Cisgender, Asian American Man

Todd's and Joseph Levitt's experiences as cis-gender, Asian American men illustrate the many ways in which identities are not monolithic. While Todd and Joseph Levitt appear to share similar identities, their experiences differ significantly due to the racial dynamics within their communities and the boundary maintenance behaviors that

they experienced in their home and school environments. These boundaries are co-formed at the intersection of the immigrant experience, the Asian American experience, and cultural value systems.

Todd grew up in family and school spaces where he was part of the Asian American majority. He often refers to the Model Minority myth and the American Dream as central to his upbringing and many of his experiences run parallel with Lee's (2009) discussion of Asian-identified students. His parents instilled in him a combination of traditional Taiwanese and new immigrant values that reflected filial piety, the importance of academic and financial success, and an understanding that there were already set patterns for how Asian Americans can succeed in the US. Todd carried these values to school, where he and his classmates enacted boundary maintenance behaviors reflecting the Model Minority Myth, colorism, and hegemonic masculinity.

Joseph Levitt grew up in spaces where Asian Americans were a minority and he existed outside of his Asian American classmates' definitions of what it meant to be Asian American. His parents maintained boundaries around Vietnamese culture and traditions and prevented him from engaging with White classmates. Within his family, Joseph Levitt's only model of masculinity was from his father, whose masculine expressions he saw as misogynistic. At school, he confronted boundaries around Asian American identity possibilities that excluded educational success, and therefore excluded him. The expressions of Asian American identity that Joseph Levitt describes are very similar to those of South East Asian students in Lee's (2009) study. As he shifted friend groups to interact more with his classmates from AP classes, he was confronted with hegemonic masculinity. Boundary maintenance behaviors around masculinity were

reminiscent of those described by Kehily (2001), Pascoe (2007), and several other scholars. Being both cisgender male and Asian American, he realized that he had as much of a right to define these identities as his parents or classmates and enacted agency in his self-definition.

By choosing to self-define, Joseph Levitt positions himself as “I as Authentic Definer” (Kahn et al., 2011). As Kahn et al. (2011) describe, “this I-position presents a resistance to hegemony in emphasizing an aspect of humanness that can only be self-defined and is not imposed by social standards” (p. 39). Joseph Levitt extends his authentic definer positioning to define both his masculinity and his Vietnamese-American identities.

Todd’s rejection of the masculine identity possibilities that he has encountered over time aligns with Kahn et al.’s (2011) “I as Marginalized Outsider.” Men who position themselves as outsiders tend to distance themselves from masculinity in response to intersecting hegemonic masculinity and racism. These two interlocking power structures – hegemonic masculinity and the Model Minority Myth – are clear throughout Todd’s life story and are likely tied to his rejection of masculinity.

After moving from a predominantly Asian American community to a community with a large population of White people, Todd has chosen to foreground his Asian American identities over his queer identities. As a queer, Asian American individual, Todd may have chosen to engage in racial activism in order to remain a part of a community in Minnesota, rather than being intersectionally invisible (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Joseph Levitt’s engagement in activism appears to come from a more

empathetic positioning in which he sees himself as separate from the People of Color for whom he advocates.

While they grew up in different environments, both Todd and Joseph Levitt responded to these experiences of being constricted by identity boundaries by enacting agency and rejecting Asian American and masculine identity possibilities maintained at home and school in favor of self-defined identities seeking new identities. These experiences confronting and moving beyond boundaries have shaped how Todd and Joseph Levitt see themselves in the world just as our individual experiences shape how each of us defines and expresses our identities.

Chapter 6: Becoming (A)Gender in a Racialized World

But I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within.

- Anzaldúa (2012, p. 41)

A month or two ago, I accidentally outed my relative to his parent. He was just beginning to try out he/they pronouns on Instagram and I did not realize that his Instagram was not public. Even after all this reading, writing, and thinking about identities in general and queer identities on the internet in particular, I still failed when it came to deciphering expression from experimentation and truly public spaces versus private Instagram public spaces. I resolved then that, if I could not keep my relative's identities safe, I should probably not follow their private social media pages.

This mistake, which felt terrible, made me think about my expressions of gender and sexuality. How could I not tell that he was experimenting? As Ginny said in chapter four, as a cis-gender, White woman, I am privileged to not have to think about my gender expression. I just put some clothes on in the morning, brush my hair, go about my day, and people call me she/her. Talking with Maurice and Cassandra made me realize the amount of effort that goes into expressing genders that are not as clearly defined in one's physical features.

Introduction to participants and main points

This chapter discusses Maurice and Cassandra's experiences becoming aware of their gender and sexual identities in racialized and heteronormative masculine spaces. The first section of this chapter will attend to the definition and maintenance of identity

boundaries by self, family, classmates, and acquaintances in other social spaces. The second section will discuss Maurice and Cassandra's enactments of agency in two different ways. First, both individuals took action by collecting information and expressing their identities on social media. Second, they chose with whom and how to share their gender and sexual identities and formed communities that recognized and supported them as individuals.

An intersectional analysis of Maurice and Cassandra's experiences reveals two key points. First, as a Black individual, Maurice's experiences of their agender and pansexual identities are impacted by boundaries around racial identity possibilities. This does not appear to be true for Cassandra, who only alludes to her race by mentioning that her father is Chinese. Second, while Maurice and Cassandra had very different experiences as young people, they both became aware of queer gender identity possibilities through engagement with online resources in late high school and into college.

Maurice and Cassandra

The first time I talked to Maurice, they were standing outside of a dance studio singing operatically into the night. I began to learn more about their identities and experiences in the world through their Facebook posts, where they initially requested that we begin calling them by they/them pronouns and where they shared both positive and negative moments in their life as a Black, agender, pansexual individual in Minnesota. The racist and cis-normative power structures that impact them now are an extension of boundaries around their identity possibilities that began at home and school. They faced homophobia from their father at home and a combination of racism, homophobia, and

masculine-affirming behaviors at school. These boundary maintenance activities led them to believe through childhood, adolescence, and into college that “Oh yeah, I am cisgender and heterosexual, which is just not the case.” Now, Maurice is working hard to educate people about their identities.

Cassandra performed many aspects of her transgender reality during our interview. She began by shaving her face and legs, then brushed her hair, and finally took her estrogen on camera while we were talking. Also from Minnesota, Cassandra grew up in a mixed-race household with a Chinese father and a White mother. Outside of talking about her father as a racial minority, Cassandra never mentioned her own racial identity during our interview. Outwardly, I had assumed that she would identify as Asian American, but she only refers to herself as such when she posts money requests on a mutual aid Facebook page for Minnesota.

Within the context of our interview, Cassandra foregrounds her gender and sexuality and rarely mentions her race.

I identify as a transgender lesbian woman. [Pointing to a flag behind her in the camera] This is actually one of the many lesbian flags. Yeah, there isn't an official lesbian flag because there are five or six different ones that people in the lesbian community agree on....This one that I have here is, I believe, meant to be more egalitarian for people who identify as lesbian but, you know, not just Butch and not just extremely femme. You know it's just meant to be supportive for any and all people who identify as lesbian, sapphic, femme, loving women loving women.

Cassandra chooses to hang the flag that includes all women who love women, including lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, and queer female-identified people. While she identifies as a lesbian, Cassandra does qualify that she has mainly dated non-binary or transgender people who tend to date each other more often than cisgender people.

Like how even though I identify as a lesbian, in a way I am technically bisexual. Well, I guess just because of how my first ever first date was with someone who identified as nonbinary. And the second date that I went on was with someone else who was nonbinary. So I have been on dates with people who have been identified as female. One thing that I've learned is that transgender people are more willing to date other transgender people than cisgender people, which is nice, but it would be nice if the sissies weren't actual sissie.

Cassandra takes this opportunity to point out the oft-debated difference between transwomen and sissies who are usually defined as male-identified people performing femininity as a sexual fetish. Perhaps she was performing her femininity during our interview through shaving, brushing her hair, and taking her estrogen to differentiate herself from sissies. Like Maurice, Cassandra uses Facebook as a tool to share both her positive and negative experiences as a transgender, lesbian woman and to gain affirmation from her Facebook friends.

Boundaries that Make One's Identities Difficult to Locate

Neither Maurice nor Cassandra began to recognize their gender and sexual identities until late high school or college. I attribute this at least in part to the boundaries around gender and sexual identities that were maintained by their families, themselves, and their classmates. This section will focus on the definition and maintenance of boundaries at home and in school. In addition, this section will discuss ongoing boundary maintenance behaviors around gender identities within the Lindy Hop community, dating apps, and society in general. Each of these sections tends to focus on either Maurice or Cassandra as they emphasized different spaces in which they experienced boundaries.

Boundary Maintenance by Family and Self

Maurice and Cassandra both encountered boundaries around their gender and sexual identities maintained by their parents. While Maurice described instances that

clearly placed boundaries around who they could be, Cassandra's experiences with her family were much more embedded in boundaries that she drew around her own identity possibilities.

Maurice grew up in a household where boundaries around masculinity and heterosexuality were actively maintained. When asked about instances in which they felt like hiding their identities, Maurice recalls:

My dad saying, "Hey, as long as you like girls, it's fine with me." And I was like yeah, I do not really like women so you can get out of here with that. It really put a damper on pursuing anything. Even my brother who I thought was generally conservative is now definitely not. He's proved that point completely. He's like, "Oh yeah, you get to date all types of people and accept them for who they are. Fuck Yeah, you do what you do." That was a really large turning point in my brother and I's relationship because it was not good before.

While their father remained unsupportive of Maurice's agender and pansexual identities, their brother proved to be much more open to expanding his understandings of gender and sexual identity possibilities to accept Maurice.

Cassandra is different from many participants in that she rarely describes any specific boundary maintenance behaviors at home or school during her childhood that were separate from herself. Rather, she recalls feelings of depression and dissociation between herself and her interests.

I was extremely depressed my entire time growing up, and as a result, I never made any exciting or ambitious choices with my academic or social life. I never really toured any colleges to see where I wanted to go. I never took any exciting coursework in the college that I went to, until the last couple of years. I went to a very tiny University in a very tiny town with not a whole lot to go for it. So I was really bored there and I never really connected with anyone. So the entire time that I was there, I stayed in a dorm and I was probably the only person that I knew of that just stayed in the dorm the entire time. Everyone else that I knew had their roommates that they would meet in college or have their friends and then they would move out and off-campus with their friends. And I just continued to stay in a dorm because I did not know how to connect with anyone until right before my

last semester when I started transitioning. And as a result, I never really did anything to pursue any ambition in my education. I just felt like I was just doing the bare minimum and I did not put any effort into the studies or the projects that I did. I never felt like I could do any of the internships that I am doing right now. I never studied abroad. I just would go there [to the university], go back home less than an hour away, go to school, go home less than an hour away. It was like that for four and a half years. I know, I was very sad, I was a very sad person. I was very, very sad.

Not yet recognizing her transgender and lesbian identities, Cassandra placed boundaries around her identity possibilities, living as a male-bodied person throughout primary and secondary school and well into college. It may have been her reinforcement of these boundaries that led Cassandra to distance herself from school and possible friends before her first experiences of gender dysphoria. This dysphoria became clearer in college as Cassandra describes below.

So my story kind of sucks to talk about but what happened was after my first year at college, I started feeling dysphoric for the first time just looking at all the cute college girls going by. And for me personally, before that, I remember just always having more female friends than male friends. And a lot of that was me just having my crushes on them, which happened all the time. But at the same time, I never even realized how much I wanted to look just like them too, which was something that did not really awaken until my first year in college, seeing all the cute girls seeing how attractive they were, still having that attraction to them but also being like, “Wow, I wish that I looked like them. They look so pretty. I want to be like that.” Just going through the motions of that feeling, I ended up writing a paper about the ethics of having health insurance cover gender-affirming medication for transgender people. And that was me just thinking to myself and coming out of the closet and cracking. That's actually a terminology in trans culture where you're an egg who is cracked. If you're someone who's transgender and you do not know that you're transgender, you're referred to as an egg. When you start to have dysphoric feelings and think “I do not identify with the gender I was assigned with at birth,” then you are referred to as an egg that has been cracked. That was the first time that I ever started to crack. And when I told my parents that I had these feelings, they were quite shocked and so as a result, I tried really, really hard to repress those feelings and just stay deep in the closet for a couple of years, which is one of the reasons why my schooling was just so horrible for me because I had kept myself oppressed the entire time. I lived in dorms with only boys. I did not know how to connect with anyone. I did not know anyone else who was identifying as transgender and it was just really lonely. This probably happened when I started to crack again in early 2017. So this was the

semester before I graduated, I graduated in December 2017. Okay, and I started to crack again in March 2017, which was when I started to talk to people more and actually talk through my feelings about not wanting my genitalia, wanting to have a different voice, not wanting my facial hair, wanting to dress up more effeminate, to have long hair, and all the things that are traditionally associated with a female gender expression to put it simply. Some of the people that I talked to were old co-workers of mine who were transgender, asking them, “Hey, what exactly was gender dysphoria for you?” And then they would talk through the motions of it. And then I would confess that I think I feel that way about myself too. And they were very happy for me to come out to them like that because of how important it is to talk to other people like that.

Cassandra initially faced tension between her feelings of dysphoria and the boundaries established by her parents around intelligible gender identities. She interpreted their initial shocked response to her feelings of dysphoria as a rejection of transgender identities and kept herself within the boundaries of cisgender identities for three more years. As she began to transition, she carried on two lives, performing masculinity at home and on Facebook and femininity in dance spaces where her identities were recognized and affirmed. It took her much longer to come out to her parents and begin her public transition.

Classmates, Joking, and Unintelligibility

As discussed above, Cassandra compared herself to her college classmates but did not indicate any ways in which they maintained boundaries around her identity possibilities. Maurice, however, experienced boundary maintenance behaviors around gender and sexual identities through primary and secondary school and into college. This section will focus on Maurice’s experiences with boundary maintenance throughout their schooling.

Masculinity-affirming behaviors also occurred among Maurice’s friends at school as a form of gender boundary maintenance.

Well, I mean growing up the common words used. We were just calling each other gay or faggot or all sorts of other things, and not realizing the potential damage that we were doing to each other in the long run. Realizing that we were sort of perpetuating a plethora of things that would eventually become a problem later. We even had an openly transgender student in the sixth grade who was identifying as a woman at the age of 12. [We used these words] not realizing the damage that we would do later. In Middle School, I would probably say there wasn't a lot too much. In fact, I've probably blocked out a lot of middle school due to a bunch of different trauma that happened. But as far as I can tell, most of the time, it was just racism and getting past that, but otherwise, it's the same thing. Just using slurs, and figuring out all sorts of things. It was not the time to grow, it was more of the time to understand that we were going through puberty and not understanding a fucking thing of what we were saying.

Maurice recognizes that labeling friends with homophobic or racial slurs impacted all of them far beyond their school years. At one point, they mentioned that many of their friends have come out as gay since leaving high school and have had to work through the trauma that they inflicted on each other in school. This indicates a sort of paradox in which Maurice and their friends were maintaining boundaries around gender and sexuality that restricted all of them from recognizing and expressing their current identities.

Maurice first began experimenting with their gender and sexual identities in college, where they studied in the theater department.

College was an experience. In my first year, I was generally still under the impression that I was somewhere on the asexual spectrum, but still had some sort of sex drive. I am attracted to all sorts of people but did not realize it. And then I had started just exploring because I was in the theater department. So I went around having sex with people from all sorts of facets of genders, and the spectrum was a lot larger than I thought. I was like, "Okay, this, this is just this is just way bigger than anything that I could have imagined" which kept moving me further left on the spectrum of political ideology and things of that nature.

Their recognition of their agender, pansexual identities, however, was beyond the boundaries of intelligible identities for many of their classmates. They recall that their

attempts to explain their identities to conservative Christian classmates were met with incomprehension or an unwillingness to learn and understand.

I almost did not talk about it until I got to college, where I was surrounded by people who would not budge to even fucking understand what I was talking about. I was surrounded by conservative Christians, so even giving any sort of perspective about how I identify and how I do things like who I've dated, they're like, "Oh yeah, this just goes over my head." And I am like, "Well, I've explained it to you as best as I can. From the perspective of God, it probably doesn't make a whole ton of fucking sense because you think that the way that I practice my life is inherently sin." So yeah.

This disinterest in learning about and accepting Maurice's identities on what was probably a religious basis extended to general refusal to respect and use Maurice's "they/them" pronouns. Maurice perceived their identities as beyond the boundaries of possible identities maintained by conservative Christians who likely saw their gender and sexual identities as sinful.

A lot of the people were, of course, conservative Christians, and telling anyone that I slept with transgender people [was] out of the question completely. Telling people that I was anywhere on some sort of agender spectrum was out of the question. Then when I did, when I was like, I am gonna stop caring, this is something that about me is important to me, no one cared. Everyone just saw me as straight. So I felt like I am not doing enough with my appearance or something like that and finding out the perceptions of what people think gay is, which is generally not culturally accepted by everyone but yeah, I found out at a certain point that apparently I wasn't presenting gay enough for people to actually think that I am somewhere on the spectrum. So it's like, I mean, I can straight pass for all four years, but I was very adamant. I was telling people to use they/them pronouns for me, and people worked on it and then it did not work and eventually at some point, I just gave up, because at this point I need to work on not making compromises but work on knowing my audience because explaining gender theory to rural Iowans is not it's not my favorite thing.

Maurice ran into boundaries around the ways conservative Christian people expected queer people to express their identities, not "presenting as gay enough" because they do not present as ultra-flamboyant as is depicted in the media. Their classmates saw them as a male-bodied, heterosexual, Black man, because those were the proscribed identities for

someone who looked like Maurice and they expressed themselves outwardly in ways that fit within their classmates' understandings of those boundaries. Thus, it was difficult, if not impossible, for Maurice to explain that they did not fit within the conservative Christian definition of the heterosexual Black man. Maurice found themselves facing religious, heterosexual, White, cisgender power structures that they pushed back against for a while. In the end, they persisted in using they/them pronouns but chose to stop educating their classmates about their agender and pansexual identities.

Boundaries Maintained by Social Groups

As agender and transgender individuals, Maurice and Cassandra have continued to encounter boundaries around their identities after publicly expressing their gender identities. In this section, I will focus on Maurice's experiences as a Black, agender individual within the Lindy Hop community and Cassandra's experiences searching for jobs and dating as a transgender, lesbian woman.

As an agender, Black, pansexual individual, Maurice came into conflict with White, heteronormative, cisgender power structures in the Lindy Hop dance community. While Lindy Hop is a historically Black dance from the 1930s, it was revived in the late 1980s by White people who now define what it means to be a good Lindy Hop dancer and place specific, historically bound expectations on Black dancers.

In Lindy Hop, gosh, I feel like I just have to be a dude in a suit, a White dude in a suit, to be culturally accepted in now's Lindy Hop. That's the best way to explain that because I do not feel comfortable wearing a dress. There are just some things I just do not feel comfortable wearing because I do not know how people are going to perceive me. If I am anything that is out of the norm of what old black dancers were doing, it is not culturally accepted at all. And most of them were fucking straight. What are we going to do about that as black queer dancers who are coming into it later? So I do not feel comfortable doing those things, because

if I enter a competition, make finals, and I want to wear something even that bends gender at all, it's not happening.

I reached out to a Black, cisgender female Lindy Hop instructor to learn more about this dynamic within the Lindy Hop community. She explained that from the racial perspective, the White leaders of the Lindy Hop revival placed the three remaining Black dancers from the 1930s on a pedestal and established that any dance moves that strayed from their original repertoire were not “good” Lindy Hop. The expectation to conform was especially strict when directed at Black dancers. This particular instructor has bumped up against the racial boundaries within the Lindy Hop community and was the person who organized the meeting described by Joseph Levitt and Todd in the previous chapter. Maurice being Black, agender, and pansexual faces not only the racial boundaries but exists beyond the boundaries of intelligible gender and sexual identities maintained by the Lindy Hop community.

The boundaries that Cassandra bumps up against are enacted and maintained by the greater US society. She fears leaving home and exposing herself to the hurt and danger that transgender women experience across the US.

I still live at home with my parents because of how I keep doing my unpaid internships and how highly likely it is for someone like me it is to be discriminated against because of my gender identity. So I am just worried about trying to get a job or getting fired from my job and ending up on the street, which is why I still live at home.

She has difficulty finding internships that will provide either housing or payment and accept transgender female applicants. Cassandra is particularly concerned about her personal safety and acceptance at internships in the southern US.

I had done all this stuff that I had always wanted to do and this was a lot of stuff that I probably should have done when I was still in college. But at the same time, I never did. And it kind of does feel like I've lost a lot of opportunities because

now I am trying to look for a lot of internships. And the thing about them is that I have to find ones that either do not require me to be in college still, can provide housing or money or both, and are somewhere where the people who work there wouldn't have a hindrance with my gender identity or my sexual orientation. So if I did an internship at an even more rural area, in the deep south, for instance, that would be very challenging for me to do and I have sent out applications for other jobs and internships in say, Georgia and Florida. So I am not completely opposed to working in one of those states, but at the same time, it can be dangerous for me to do that.

Cassandra finds that her identities conflict with boundaries established by heteronormative, cisgender political powers, thus limiting her ability to find employment and physical safety in certain spaces in the US.

She also finds her identities to be outside of the heteronormative, cisgender identity boundaries maintained by many people on dating apps.

Another thing that's made it difficult is dating. I'll have people who will not be interested in me because of my gender identity. And this was something that I had struggled with for a long time, calling myself a lesbian. I know that I've always been attracted to women, but I never felt comfortable calling myself a lesbian, which of course defined as a woman attracted to other women or feminine people. That just never sat right with me until one day I decided, 'Hey, this is no one but you, just say it.' And after that, I was like, 'Wow, okay, I am so gay. I am gay for womens ...must have womens ...so many humans.' I doubt myself, but when I am on my dating profiles, a lot of girls are attracted to me. I've been on quite a few dates and I've matched with quite a few people. Some of them have been grossed out by me, unfortunately.... And those constraints related to dating, I wish that I knew more people who were attracted to me like who saw me in person and liked me. A lot of me wanting to change who I am, whether it's like my voice or my facial hair or my literal skin, it's just because I want that to be something that other people are attracted to. I mean, I am not attracted to boys, but if I had more boys who are hitting on me, that would strangely be affirming. A lot of people might see that as problematic; a lot of trans exclusionary radical feminists will use that as a deterrent against transgender women because they 'want to be discriminated against or objectified by men.' But at the same time, I would be okay with it if it meant someone thought that I was a beautiful or attractive woman. If I were able to meet a girl attracted to other girls who sees me as another girl and also sees me as an attractive girl that would be really reaffirming for me.

Cassandra faces many boundaries around her gender and sexual identities which become more pronounced when it comes to dating. Her struggle to accept the label lesbian, for instance, may come from internalized boundaries around her gender identity as a transwoman. Cassandra also experiences transphobia within the lesbian community causing her to doubt her gender expression and desire affirmation from male-identified or, preferably, female-identified folks. She recognizes the boundaries that trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) place around her desire to be hit on by men, namely the patriarchal structures maintained when transgender women seek approval from men. However, her desire for affirmation and recognition as a woman outweighs her concern around providing justification for TERFs to reject transwomen.

As Cassandra explains, cisgender people tend to find transgender identities unintelligible and therefore reject transgender individuals as potential romantic partners. She finds that this is particularly true for transgender people who have not undergone gender-affirming surgeries to embody their masculinity or femininity.

It's really hard for you to be seen as attractive in person when you're a transgender person and you do not pass because people will see you as just a transgender body. It's kind of like tokenism for token minorities, like the token black kid or the token Asian kid, they just are seen as that black body or that Asian body. You know, they're just there to be there without anything to explore their identity or give them anything interesting to their character. And if people are able to see me as a person and not objectify me, you know, that's fine. That's nice, but I also like that romantic attention that someone might want to give me.

Cassandra recognizes that cisgender women see her as a token transgender woman with whom they can experiment without forming a romantic relationship. These boundaries around with whom society dictates Cassandra can be in relationships make it very hard for her to find long-term partners who will follow through on their attractions and build a relationship.

Although Cassandra and Maurice have transgressed the boundaries around gender identity possibilities that placed limits on their gender expressions, they now face a new set of boundaries around intelligibility. Maurice's college classmates and Cassandra's potential romantic partners are not willing to expand their understandings of identity possibilities to include agender and transgender identities. In addition, Cassandra sees herself at risk as a member of a marginalized community with very little social safety net.

Agency within Bounds

While both Maurice and Cassandra lived as cis-gender men throughout their K-12 years, they began recognizing disconnections between their understandings of their gender identities and those proscribed to them. In this section, I will begin by sharing their agentic engagement with internet sources that opened windows into identity possibilities beyond those boundaries. Then, I will discuss how they have enacted agency by creating supportive communities for themselves.

Finding and Expressing Identity Possibilities through (Social) Media

Similar to my process of placing myself on the asexual spectrum through listening to podcasts, searching on Instagram, and reading books, Maurice and Cassandra both investigated queer identity possibilities through media and social media. Since sharing their preferred pronouns on Facebook, both Maurice and Cassandra have started using Facebook as a tool to share their experiences and gain affirmation from friends.

Maurice began to fill gaps around identity possibilities when preparing for a visit from the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) in 10th grade. They decided to search the internet for information about genders and sexualities so that they would show up to class as an expert and surprise their classmates. The way that Maurice describes this makes me

assume that they intended to use the information they found to act like a class clown during the GSA meeting. However, after searching the internet and attending the GSA talk, Maurice began questioning their gender and sexuality.

This is so complex. We had the GSA talk my sophomore year, so I am in 10th grade, in the middle of English class. GSA is required to go around to every single English class and talk about biases towards gay people, all sorts of things, making sure people actually pull themselves in, even if they're allies, even if they're gay or not, outing themselves, things of that nature. A lot of people were afraid of it, eventually turning out that most of us would be gay after high school anyways. That specific class though, was really interesting, because I thought it would be hilarious to Google a bunch of things before coming into the class and be like, 'Oh, yeah, I am the person that knows everything,' not realizing that Google Search would change the fabric of my mind completely. I've never dived this far into something. And I was kind of surprised what I found. And I couldn't tell if I liked it. There was a section [of the GSA meeting] where people were like, 'Oh, yeah, do you know slurs against specific types of gender identities or sexual orientations?' And everyone else was sitting in the class and they were oh yeah. I had like 50 of them. They were like, 'How do you know all of this?' and I was like, 'Well, I did research before. I did not know if we were supposed to do this.' And from then on it was like, 'What do I do? I generally think I am heterosexual or not? I do not know.' And that it was just a giant question up until I graduated high school. I was like, 'Yeah, no, definitely not.'

Maurice points out that many of their friends and classmates were afraid of the GSA visit.

Perhaps this fear was a response to the GSA visit causing them to think outside of the boundaries around gender and sexuality that they regularly maintained and to recognize their own experiences as queer individuals. That internet search and the GSA class provided Maurice with a window through which they could begin to see identity possibilities that better matched their way of experiencing the world.

They discuss how both intersectional writings and internet resources have continued to be useful in expanding their understandings of gender and sexual identity possibilities. Maurice mentions that they studied gender possibilities through the works of Angela Davis, Alice Walker, and other scholars who address gender, class, and sexuality

as they intersect with Blackness. In addition to engaging with literature, Maurice gathers information from the internet through pornography and Twitter.

Pornography helped me find what I was sexually attracted to, probably not in the healthiest way, because porn can really mess up your brain...Twitter following political demagogues on social media, who tend to debate and provide all of their sources, giant lists of sources that they have.

They collect information from social media sources that affirms their Black, agender, and pansexual identities through data about identity possibilities around the world and across history. They also find that this information pushes them to accept other people with diverse identities.

Before coming out to two transgender friends and learning about their experiences with gender dysphoria, Cassandra began collecting information by observing the transitioning process of a band member in one of her favorite bands.

They're [Steam Power Giraffe] a steampunk band. And they're a very strange band. But one thing about them is that their band has these personas where they dress up and wear heavy makeup to look like steampunk robots. And one of the singers, her name is Isabella, she started out as male and then she started identifying as female. And so she would have a vlog and do lots of interviews on her YouTube channel about her transition. So I kind of got to watch that happen to her in real-time. And that especially awoke that feeling within me about wanting to transition to female. So if I had to pick a moment that made me think "That's what I want for myself", it would be discovering Steam Power Giraffe.

Similar to Maurice, Todd, and several other participants in this study, Cassandra first came in contact with gender identity possibilities online. Like many participants in Jenzen's (2017) study with transgender youth, Cassandra was specifically drawn to a vlog on YouTube where she could learn about transitioning from Isabella, a band member of Steam Power Giraffe.

Since coming out to her parents again, she has begun using Facebook as a resource to gain affirmation for her feminine expressions.

If you saw on my Facebook, my cover photo right now is actually from the shoot. It was my favorite photo. And looking at the comments that people had for it, a lot of people were excited to see it. They loved it, which is good. Makes me feel happy. One of the things about being transgender is that when you're in the closet and you do not think anything is worth it, you just want to hide from everything. You just want to hide from yourself. You want to hide yourself from everyone else. You do not want anyone to see you, but you might be desperate for that attention because you are tired of feeling pointless. You want people to look at you as beautiful and attractive. You want people to appreciate how you look. You want to look at yourself and look at how beautiful you can be. I started college as an introvert and I ended it as an extrovert. Now I am very extroverted. Like, if you saw me at my internship at the rehab center, you would be confused if you knew me a couple of years before. I was just so quiet and repressed myself so much and in my most recent internship, I was the crazy peppy happy girl who loved her animals in the room, which worked for me. It made me happy and being happy meant that I wanted to do things to make myself feel even better which is why like working there I would dress myself up all crazy and make myself look cutesy in the boundaries that I was given because it made me happy. I am taking my medicine right now. This is estrogen. Oh, where's the camera? There we go.

Social media is not only a space for Cassandra to find information about ways of being a trans-woman. It is also a space in which she can teach others and have her identity expressions affirmed. She is very public in her expressions of femininity as a trans-woman, even documenting herself taking her estrogen during this interview. Perhaps in sharing her experiences and learning processes, Cassandra is working to educate us about life as a transgender woman and the possibilities that it holds.

Building Supportive Communities

As discussed previously, Maurice and Cassandra constantly confront boundaries around their gender and sexual identities. While some people reject them based on their identities, both Maurice and Cassandra have built supportive communities both in-person and online.

Although Maurice's general experiences with Lindy Hop have been fairly constrictive, they have recently begun building a supportive community of Lindy Hop dancers who they see at dance events and keep in contact with through Facebook.

Lindy Focus was really nice in terms of people supporting my identities. And also Uptown Swingout where I wore it all gold sequin suit and everyone was like, 'That's a suit, that's amazing' and I was like, 'This is my moment. This is where I feel amazing.' One of my favorite people that I met the whole weekend at Lindy Focus was like, 'You are the queen, I bow down to you' and I was like, yeah, that was the endorphin raiser. And that was probably one of the best moments. I got called sparkle pants. I'll take that.

Dancers from around the country and within the international Lindy Hop community share memories of Maurice on Facebook, talking about how inspired they were by Maurice. They also find supportive spaces within the Blues dancing community in Minnesota, which is consistently much more open to Black, queer dancers.

Cassandra has also found support from within the Lindy Hop community throughout her transition. In fact, it was friends within the dance community who taught her how to do her makeup and curl her hair.

[Cassandra] It got to the point where every time you saw me at swing dances or social gatherings with the other swing dancers, and you saw me dressed up all cutesy with my dresses and my makeup, and with a bow in my hair or something, every time I did that, I did that either in the bathroom that I went to, or in the car, or I would go to someone's house. I never got dressed up at home because I did not think my parents would like that for the longest time, so there were many cold winters that I spent just in the car, putting my makeup on and getting ready so that I would look cute making an entrance going out dancing or whatnot. I am glad that I do not have to do that anymore. Not that it really matters because of how all the dances are shut down, but that was something that was a challenge for me to do. But it was something that I was able to overcome again with support from other people. So my dance friend would have me come over to her house we could put on a dress and she'd do my makeup where she would teach me how to do my makeup. She taught me how to do makeup. Or I would go over to other friends' houses and one of them would curl my hair while the other one did my makeup.

[Rose] So it seems that dance spaces were some of the spaces where you could be yourself first. Is that kind of true?

[Cassandra] Yes. And dance spaces were actually what got me to crack again back in 2017 when I came out to everyone.

In a world of constraints, Cassandra and, to some extent, Maurice have found acceptance and recognition of their identities within the Lindy Hop community.

On Being (A)Gender in a Racialized World

Both Cassandra and Maurice faced boundaries around their gender and sexual identities from a young age. Cassandra, who appears to be of Asian descent, rarely mentions race in her life story. Cassandra focuses much more on the boundaries around her gender and sexual identities enacted and maintained by herself, her parents, and the public in the US. Based on Cassandra's recollections, her physical appearance as someone with Chinese heritage has not seemed to impact her experiences as a transgender lesbian woman in Lindy Hop or society in general. Therefore, contrary to Todd's experiences in Minnesota which led him to foreground his Asian American identity over his queer identity, Cassandra has foregrounded her transgender and lesbian identities over her racial identities.

Maurice faces boundaries formed at the intersections of cisnormativity, heteronormativity, and Black identities. Similar to the experiences described by Lorde (2012), Maurice found that their Black, agender, and pansexual identities were unintelligible to family, classmates, and dancers due to normalized identity possibilities for Black individuals. At home, Maurice's father expected them to be romantically involved with women. At school, Maurice and their classmates engaged in homophobic and racist joking that maintained boundaries around racial, gender, and sexual identity

possibilities for Black, male-bodied people. After coming out as agender and pansexual, Maurice's college classmates could not reconcile their identities with stereotypes of Black people with a masculine body type. I see many of Maurice's experiences as an agender, pansexual individual as influenced by boundaries around racial identity possibilities. In contrast to Cassandra, Maurice lives in a racialized space in which their agender, Black, pansexual identities are all intertwined in how they exist in the world and how the world sees them.

In terms of agency, Cassandra and Maurice engaged with social media in many of the ways described by Cho (2018) and Jenzen (2017). They initially relied on online resources to search for identity possibilities that aligned with their experiences. Now, both Cassandra and Maurice have begun publicly expressing their gender identities through clothing, and in Cassandra's case, makeup and hairstyling. In addition, they have built supportive online and in-person communities where they encounter fewer boundaries around their gender and sexual identities, although Maurice's interactions with Lindy Hop are still impacted by racialized expectations.

Chapter 7: Gender as God Intended

Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself – a Black woman warrior poet doing my work – come to ask you, are you doing yours?

- Audre Lorde (2012, p. 30)

As a liberal, cisgender, White woman, when I think of religion and gender, I think of boundaries that religious politicians work to place around my freedom to choose what I want for my body. I think about the possibility of losing access to birth control, medication which not only reduces my chances of pregnancy but also reduces my frequency of migraines and puts an end to the debilitating pain that I endure during menstruation. When I think of religion and gender, I think about losing the option of having an abortion if I need it, and I think about the training that I received to guide people through home abortions if we ever do lose that option.

At the same time, I think about the integrity of some devoutly religious people. I always say that if I had to vote for a republican, it would be Mitt Romney because he always votes for what he believes is right even if it means going against his party. I can't help but respect him for calling bullshit when he sees it, even though I know he's right there with the party when it comes to my rights to decide for my body. In the end, the Christian God and I do not have a great relationship, but I have tried not to let our problems get in the way of my full and non-judgmental involvement in these interviews which address religion. I hope that I have given Colin and Claudia a fair chance to tell their stories in this chapter.

Introduction to Participants and Main Points

In this chapter, I discuss the experiences of Colin and Claudia, who grew up in religious households. As children, both Colin and Claudia describe themselves as having been oblivious to the possibility of different racial or sexual identities. They came to define boundaries between themselves and “the other” through exposure to People of Color and queer folks as they grew up. As they observed more ways of being, both Colin and Claudia enacted agency through their rejection of religiously grounded gender identity possibilities laid out by their families and schooling. This chapter will be organized into two main sections. The first one addresses how Colin and Claudia defined boundaries by learning about difference. The second one focuses on their rejection and redefining of their masculine and feminine identities.

This chapter contains two key points. First, as cisgender, heterosexual, White individuals, Colin and Claudia have come to understand the boundaries around their identities better through contact with people whose identities are different than their own. Meeting queer people and People of Color does not, however, cause them to critically interrogate their privilege as White, cisgender, heterosexual people. Second, they both discuss an internal dissonance between available masculine and feminine identity possibilities and their understandings of themselves, which causes them to expand or reject gender boundaries to fit their masculine or feminine identities.

Colin and Claudia

Colin grew up in California and moved to Minnesota as an adult. His parents immigrated from Ireland and he was raised in an Irish Catholic household that upheld traditions from Ireland.

My parents were both born and raised in Ireland. They're immigrants from Ireland. And so my siblings and I were born and raised in Southern California. My parents are both intensely Catholic, worked for religious orders as laypeople, and were teachers with those orders. So anyway, they were stereotypically Catholic, in terms of ideas about gender and sexuality. So those were ideas that I can try to describe, but you know, you've heard the story I am sure. I jettisoned those ideas pretty quickly... certainly by my late teenage years. And part of your question was cultural. Of course, religion is entwined with culture. Catholicism in Ireland certainly is so.

I have always assumed that Colin deliberately expressed alternative masculinity, partially because he does not give off sexually threatening vibes when dancing and partially because he is inclusive to dancers of all levels in a way that other high-level male dancers are not. I know from coming across his dating profiles online that Colin is inclined toward polyamory, which he does not share with me during our interview, making the performative nature of our interview clear. He describes himself as follows,

I mean cisgender White is accurate, of European descent is accurate. Man is accurate. Straight is probably the most accurate. Based on those parts of identity that we've just mentioned, I do not have any particular influences that are present of mind. Perhaps I'll think of them as our conversation proceeds. That was intuitive and did not require any close exam.

Colin seems to see his gender, sexual, and racial identities as self-explanatory and natural, and thus not open to critical interrogation. Perhaps this is because they are within the dominant and normative identities in the US.

Claudia also surprised me in this interview, because based on her self-presentation and our previous conversations, she seemed to embody alternative femininity. She was born and raised in Minnesota and was homeschooled by her mother using a Christian curriculum. When asked the question "So how do you identify yourself today?" she responded, "as female, heterosexual, um very by the book." She, like Colin, describes

developing an understanding of both herself and other people by coming in contact with people whose racial, gender, and sexual identities are different.

Defining Boundaries by Learning Difference

Colin and Claudia received religious education that did not include discussion of race, gender, or sexual identity possibilities. Therefore, they learned about identity possibilities only when they came in contact with people who were different from themselves. In terms of race and sexuality, this meant that neither Colin nor Claudia critically interrogated their heterosexuality or their Whiteness. However, they did face challenges to their gender identities, which led them to rethink masculinity and femininity and push back against the boundaries around gender expression maintained by their religious communities. In this section, I will analyze how they describe learning about difference at home, in school, and in community. Notably, neither Colin nor Claudia discussed social media as either maintaining boundaries around their identities or providing information necessary to push against or transgress boundaries.

Parents Drawing Boundaries Around Identities

Throughout their interviews, Claudia and Colin discuss learning about gender and racial identities from their parents. These lessons often come in the forms of implicit racism and sexism. In this section, I will discuss Colin's experiences, then Claudia's, and conclude with a comparison of the two.

When asked about how he learned about his gender, sexual, and racial identities, Colin responded, "I think all of those things for me were invisible until I encountered somebody whose identities were different or became aware that I encountered somebody

whose identity was different.” However, he does recall several moments when he came in contact with boundaries around race.

I am guessing I was younger than 10. I am sitting in my mom's four-door passenger car. I am in the front passenger seat. Mom's in the driver's seat. I do not remember where we were going or what we were doing, but we were parked on the side of the road by a curb waiting for some reason. And it's one of those old cars where the lock is the plunger on top of the door panel. So when it goes up and down, you can see it through the window. But anyway, I am just zoning out minding my own business and we're parked there and I just hear my mom say “lock the door.” So I reach up and you know, finger on top of the lock, punch or push it down quick. And of course, I look up as I am doing that and there's a black man walking down the sidewalk towards our car and I may have my memory rewritten, etc., so I could be wrong about this, but I think I recall meeting eyes with him briefly. And I recall feeling bad, because as I am going click, I look up at him and I am like, “I wonder if he knows what just happened.” And so my presumption is that my mom felt unsafe, for whatever reason, you know, black dude. All I know is a black man was walking towards us on the sidewalk and we were parked there. And, you know, that's the end of that story. He moved on with his life, he may or may not have thought anything of it. But it stood out to me. So, to me, that is an early memory that relates to racial identity.

Colin's detailed memory of this incident and his feeling of guilt indicates to me that it was significant in his learning of Whiteness and Blackness. I remember a similar incident within my family. I was riding in a car with my grandfather in rural Alabama and he told me to close the windows as we entered a predominantly Black town. I did what he asked, but I also thought, “My grandpa is racist.” By asking us to lock the doors, our elders were teaching us the boundaries between Whiteness and Blackness and re-enforcing notions that Black people are dangerous. In addition, our elders were teaching us to perform microaggressions to remind Black people of those boundaries. While this event did stand out to Colin and caused him to think about Blackness and Whiteness, he does not discuss any further insights into how this impacted his racial identity development.

His mom's education about racial differences and displays of implicit racism did not stop with that instance, however. Colin recalls that his mother strongly encouraged

her children to marry people from the same Irish-Catholic culture and was rejecting of partners who did not fit this mold.

I realized much later that my mom was umm... my youngest brother was dating a woman that he later married. Her family is of Mexican descent. My mom was very intensely into the idea of all of us dating or marrying people who were both Irish and Catholic, which did not happen. My instinct because I've heard this rhetoric often enough is that the things like culture are often a stand-in for race in that conversation. If you're told that you want someone to share your cultural norms or whatever, that seems to emphasize difference between people who are of different backgrounds which often correlates with race. Anyway, my mom was really venomous towards my younger brother's girlfriend for a long time and they were dating for close to a decade exclusively and then got married and now have a baby, which strikes me as a model of Catholic union or whatever.

Colin worked hard to avoid using the term “racist” in this part of our interview, saying that his mom was “umm...” and focusing on how culture is often used to refer to race.

Perhaps this is due to his own discomfort discussing race and racism as a cisgender, White, heterosexual man. While he never addresses racism or Whiteness head-on, Colin is clearly conscious of the racial connotations of the boundaries his mom maintained around her childrens’ relationships. Requiring that her children were in partnerships with Irish Catholic people to carry on the traditions that she grew up with, his mom was establishing an expectation that their partners were White.

While Colin mostly discussed learning about racial differences within his family, Claudia mainly describes learning about gender. When asked about who impacted the development of her gender, sexual, and racial identities, Claudia responded:

I'll just start with gender identity. That's definitely probably from my parents. They kind of modeled... Oh, goodness, this is difficult. I've never really thought about this super in-depth. My gender identity has never really been in question at all. It's just kind of part of my baseline sense of being. The only thing that makes that being female significant is to contrast it with a male and I have a delightful father and I grew up with seven brothers. So I was just kind of very aware of what I was because of that contrast. But I wouldn't say it's anything that changed

dramatically over time. It's just kind of been what I was from the start, and there's ever really been a struggle over that. And then, sexual orientation, I've only ever found men attractive. I am a formally trained artist and so I've drawn many nudes and I do totally see the appeal of the female form, but it doesn't do anything for me in the same way.

As Claudia further elaborates on her identity development, she describes interactions within her family that some people might experience as boundary maintenance behaviors around gender expression.

Earliest memory, gender identities, I would say that's probably my mother dressing me up in lots of frilly things when I was young and me being told all the time to sit with my knees together. I do not know those are.... like, I've always known I was a girl. The points I am thinking of are more like the bare and more embarrassing points, like when you get your first period, where it's like, horribly obvious that 'Oh, my goodness, yeah, there is something up with this with this act I am doing.' Being told I couldn't wrestle with my brothers anymore when I was around nine or 10. I've always been a pretty frilly, sparkly creature, and I've been pretty comfortable in it.

Claudia was surrounded by gendered messages about what she could and couldn't do as a girl, but unlike many participants who saw these lessons as boundaries, Claudia seems to have integrated them into her way of being feminine.

In both Colin and Claudia's cases, their parents taught these lessons about difference indirectly through actions and household explanations. For instance, Colin's mother taught him to distance himself from Black people by asking him to lock the door. Claudia's parents taught her that playful physical contact with men was inappropriate by forbidding her from wrestling with her brothers. These actions by their parents increased Colin and Claudia's awareness of the boundaries between their identities and those of other people.

Schooling for White Christian People

Colin and Claudia went through very different forms of religious education. Claudia was homeschooled in a Christian curriculum and schooling mainly consisted of lessons that her mother taught her. Colin attended private Catholic schools throughout primary and secondary school. During his school days, Colin interacted with classmates and educators in spaces infused with a hidden curriculum that supported boundaries around cisgender, heterosexual, hegemonic masculine identities. In this section, I will look at Colin and Claudia's experiences with primary and secondary education. As Claudia says less about her homeschooling, this section focuses primarily on Colin.

When describing her education, Claudia recalls one time when she encountered an overt gendered message that she rejected outright.

My parents are very conservative Christian. Some of that I've hung on to and some of that I've let go as culture and not necessarily religion. I remember she [my mom] gave me this one book that was something like you need a male authority in your life, who can be a spiritual guide over you, otherwise women are more susceptible to attacks from the devil. It's really bad, really antiquated ideas of women needing men. And it's funny, I fought my mom, I did not even finish that book because I couldn't get through the first few chapters. And it's funny that even though she taught that, I never really saw her acting out her own life that way. She was a homemaker and she was a teacher, but she also had her own life out of the house. And she did not really submit to my father in the extremes that that book suggested are necessary for a woman.

While Claudia's mother provided her with information about expectations regarding gender roles, she did not seem to model them for Claudia. Perhaps this talking the talk but not walking the walk gave Claudia the space to enact agency, reject the lessons from this book, and expand the boundary around women's roles.

Colin describes his Catholic schools as not including any formal education around race, gender, or sexuality. With regards to diversity, equity, and inclusion, Colin says, "I

mean, looking back, the biggest thing that stands out to me is really the lack of awareness.” He elaborates on this by describing how he was not given information on possible identities and therefore couldn’t identify the boundaries around his own identities.

If you perceive that dimensions of your identity to fit well with the, maybe I can use the phrase majority culture, that identity tends to be invisible in a way where it's easy to perceive. So, I think with regard to grade school, thinking about gender and sexual orientation, I'd make a similar comment to what I made about high school which is that my guess is that it's harder for me to perceive the boundaries of or the contours let's say of my own identity if I do not see somebody else who's different and I may not have seen the people who are different because private Catholic school, right? So my guess is that in very subtle ways, there were folks that may have departed from the norm in terms of gender or sexuality, but I wouldn't have been aware.

Colin is very careful with his words, referring to himself as fitting well with the “majority culture” and not being aware of people who “departed from the norm in terms of gender or sexuality.” This indicates to me that he is either concerned about being politically correct or uncomfortable with the topic. He recognizes that the Catholic values embedded in his schooling may have placed boundaries around peoples’ gender and sexual identity possibilities, resulting in very little diversity in terms of gender and sexual expressions.

Colin discussed how while he did not receive any information about gender or sexuality at school, students made jokes about gay people.

I did not have any information that was explicit about gender or sexuality, and there were a lot of gay jokes amongst just the students. There was a lot of using “gay” as a pejorative. It was extremely common.

As such, students reinforced boundaries around sexual identities without having any explicit knowledge of gender or sexual identity possibilities. Without people to compare himself to, Colin struggled to recognize his own identities. In a way, this could be seen as the effects of a hidden curriculum within Colin’s schools to imbue the student body with

Catholic, heteronormative, cisnormative values and keep them blind to identity possibilities outside of the proscribed boundaries of Catholicism as they were in the late 1980s and 1990s when he was in school.

This hidden curriculum included a separation of men and women, which Colin explains is to reduce distraction.

I mean one thing that is clear, what men are or should be, and what masculinity was or should be, I do not recall being explicitly explained, but it is clearly built into the whole structure of my schooling in a specific way because I went to an all-boys High School. So there's an underlying idea that young men are, in some respects, maybe monolithic, or at least they are a distinct category that needs to be treated differently. And the idea was that young men will have a better educational experience if they are all together without the distraction of women. And so there was an all-girls Catholic High School that was a little ways away. That was our sister school and once in a while, we'd go there for an event or whatever. And so I think that clearly includes information about, at the very least, that certain young men are a certain way and certain conditions are good for young men and that women are in some sort of unhelpful distraction to put it the most mild way I can.

Colin saw the separation of young men and young women in the school setting as an indication of the boundaries around masculinity enacted by Catholic schooling. This separation taught him that young men are unique from young women, who distract them from their goals. This messaging from school in the form of prioritizing football and having gender-segregated education, alongside lessons around masculinity embedded in Catholic doctrine and general society, maintained boundaries around a gender expression that Colin did not see for himself.

Not knowing about Catholic values myself, I asked Colin to elaborate on what he meant by that. He responded:

The general messaging is a conflation. It's kind of a, "it is, therefore it should be" kind of reasoning. At least that's the way I interpret it. So we look around our world and observe that men and women fall into these two categories and more or

less have these two sets of preferences and therefore there are these two distinct categories. And folks who depart from those categories may need some kind of counseling and we're gonna love them, but there's something off there. So one really obvious statement that I can make about a Catholic version of masculinity is that masculinity is connected to being a male and men. That category of people is attracted to women. There are ideas that, last I checked, are still hanging around of men as protectors. I believe growing up I was still hearing ideas about "The man is the provider and the protector of the family." And the narrative was starting to shift. It's a way of kind of acknowledging what some folks think Catholicism might identify as a newfangled trend in thinking. All this thinking about diverse gender identities is just a newfangled trend, but really, you know, the world will somehow come around if we Catholics just keep preaching our ideas as clearly as we can. So in terms of masculinity, that is connected to also being in charge in the marital relationship. Of course, the typical Catholic line last I checked is still true today is that there's no sex before marriage, that is bad and sinful fornication. And so you're going to only date for the purpose of marriage. I've never been told that there is a meaningful distinction between gender and biological sex. As a man, you need to be somewhat more in charge of the marital relationship. They're smart enough to no longer say you're in charge of your wife. But they are saying, well, it's kind of a partnership, but the man is like 51% in charge. So, that is the messaging that I got, and I have to meander into other areas because, in that way of thinking, it's all connected, right? The roles that the man plays in society or a household are all intertwined. And so I have to treat it as a package because that's the way it was sold to me. And, of course, thinking back at the way that you've asked these questions, there was that messaging as a young man in high school layered on top of the more implied messages that I got about masculinity. Remember earlier I was talking about going to a football High School? They had a really nice weight room. Because of the dedication of resources and emphasis of the school, it was clear where that went. Which direction they were pushing us, you know?

In other words, Catholic beliefs about gender and sexuality follow cis-heteronormative patterns. Male-bodied people are men, should express masculinity, and be attracted to and protective of women. Female-bodied people are women, express femininity, and are attracted to men. Any divergence from this pattern was seen as irregular and could eventually be resolved through scripture. Colin connects these beliefs about masculinity and male dominance to both the gender segregation of his all-boys high school and the neighboring girls' school as well as the prioritization of football and fitness at his school. Although he mentions at one point that his schools were racially diverse, he does not

mention race again in relation to education. This makes me wonder if the hidden curriculum of his private Catholic schools may have contained messages about everyone being equal and race not having an impact on people's everyday lives.

The Influences of College

Although Claudia had a fairly different K-12 experience than Colin, they both attended undergraduate programs that broadened their understandings of themselves and their places in the world. In this section, I discuss Claudia and Colin's encounters with people expressing different gender and sexual identities and Colin's pursuit of information about historically-grounded race relations in California.

When Claudia went to college she was exposed to gender and sexual expressions beyond the boundaries of what she was taught.

Oh my! So I went to a small private art school. And right out of the gate, a lot of my classmates decided to experiment with their sexuality and their gender expression. Some just for art projects, some just for the, I do not know. I do not think they think that way anymore. They've gone back to their heterosexual selves. And others, they do continue to live that out. Gender expression was probably the biggest one that I saw going around and thought about a lot because of that. I just keep coming back to this image of my one classmate who wore a little girl's leotard into class one day because he was doing a performance art thing on perceptions of clothing. Like yeah, you look like a pedophile because you're wearing a little girl's leotard and you're a 20 something-year-old guy. I think it's healthy to go through that thought process of what all these image and identity implications are, but at the same time, I never found myself changed by them.

Within this statement, I get the impression that Claudia, herself, enacted boundary maintaining behaviors around gender and sexual identity possibilities for her classmates.

When she refers to her classmates as going "back to their heterosexual selves," Claudia is assuming that heterosexuality was their baseline and that they were experimenting or expressing other gender identities for a short time, not that they were finally free to

express their true selves. Her response to the classmate wearing a leotard contains so many messages about both her expectations for masculine expression and sexuality, namely that pedophiles wear leotards and men who have “age-appropriate” sex do not. These judgments Claudia places on how people experiment with their gender identity and sexual orientation indicate that she was maintaining boundaries around what she believes is acceptable.

Colin first came into contact with people who were openly gay when he served as a residence assistant (RA) in college. Rather than assuming that they are heterosexual people who were experimenting, as Claudia seems to think, Colin recognizes his friends as queer. He takes his newfound knowledge of sexual identity possibilities and uses it to think back on the possibility that his K-12 classmates may also have been queer.

I was an RA in the dorms, second year of college...I recall the school doing a pretty good job of creating a diverse RA staff. So there a lot of different dimensions, including sexual orientation and religion and race and you know, I assume the list goes on, but my memory is fuzzy at this point. So, that may have been the first time where I was pretty tight with some people who were gay and out. And like, because by the way, my suspicion was that in high school there was probably a bunch of gay dudes in my all-boys Catholic High School. My guess is that this was not a friendly environment for gay guys and therefore, there was probably a bunch of gay dudes that I did not know were gay.

Throughout these recollections of K-12 schooling and college, Colin parses out the potential boundaries placed on students’ sexual identity possibilities that led to his lack of contact with queer people before college.

Colin also began engaging intellectually in courses about race and history at college that pushed him to think about Native American history and race relations between White and Latin@ people in California.

I sought out some stuff in college that might be relevant here, I believe I took at least one class that took a pretty deep dive into indigenous American history in terms of defining specific nations and specific events in those nations' interactions with the new United States, etc. You know, some books by indigenous authors. I do not remember much of it at this stage, but that was an explicit part of the curriculum, not something I sought out. It was a core course. There was another one. I recall a class that included a lot of information about Latino history in Southern California. I recall a more detailed discussion of the Zoot Suit riots, these World War Two riots, White soldiers coming off the boat and beating up a bunch of Latino guys, and the tension in the area. I think a lot of these classes focused on historical events. And identity was discussed by implication kind of indirectly, I think. My suspicion is that there were classes that I did not take that would have helped. I knew that I was interested in history and I took those classes and then that, exposes me to some discussions of historical events that help with an understanding of racial identity, but I do not remember.

While these courses may have made Colin think about history and racial identity, he talks about the content as external to himself in a way that indicates to me that he did not use it to critically interrogate his own racial identity.

At some point, there was a TA who was introducing the class to the idea. I am paraphrasing but something to the effect of, race is something that society assigns to you and ethnicity is something that you choose for yourself. That was the talking point or at least my at the time I take away. I did not prior to that struggle with racial or ethnic identity. But that was an explicit invitation to decide certain things for myself coming from a figure of perceived authority.

Being the child of Irish immigrants, Colin may have had aspects of ethnic identity to parse out. However, he did not elaborate on this moment further in our interview. Colin's lack of direct discussion about his own racial or ethnic identities indicates to me either a discomfort with discussing race as a White person or a failure on my part to ask further questions. His use of hedging language throughout his discussion of racial incidents with his mom makes me assume that he is uncomfortable, which aligns with Gabi's frustrations around White people's discomfort with discussing Jewish culture.

Both Claudia and Colin became much more aware of different identity possibilities after they left their religious-based primary and secondary schooling and

entered college. However, even in spaces with fewer boundaries around their identities, both Claudia and Colin appear to have experienced these identity possibilities, particularly around racial and sexual identities, as external to themselves. In terms of gender expression, however, they continued to acknowledge and push back against religious and cultural boundaries around masculinities and femininities.

Learning Boundaries Through Friends and Community

Colin and Claudia also learned about racial differences through experiences with friends and interactions with strangers. In this section, I will analyze an experience that Colin had with a friend and a police officer. Then, I will discuss how Claudia's interaction with a Black customer and later interactions with the Black community in Cleveland, Ohio informed her understandings of racial identities and differences between races.

In terms of racial consciousness, Colin describes one friend who raised his awareness of different life experiences and resulting beliefs between people of color and himself.

I have a friend who's of Peruvian ancestry. She's born and raised in the US, I think her family was Peruvian, perhaps it may have been a generation or two back when they immigrated. We used to hang out a lot in high school and thereafter. But anyway, I am going back to the part where you asked who might have influenced some of these dimensions of identity. One of those was this friend because in casual conversation she's my age we hung out. But, she would mention things like, "Oh, you're so White," or something like that when I would do XYZ, and being like, let's say 15 or 16 at the time, I'd be like, "Oh, what do you mean?" You know, we'd have a little exchange about what in her perspective that meant. Being relatively comfortable with having a chat with police officers was one. I remember there was one incident where we were just walking down the sidewalk and I saw some cops doing something. I was like, "Hey, man, what's going on?" And he was like, "I do not know, this one thing happened." I was like, "Alright, cool." And I walked back to her. She's like, "You just talk to the cops? What's wrong with you?" You know that was apparently in her view, a really unwise

thing to do in her experience. So there were a few comments I can make in terms of individuals who may have at least brought some glimmer of awareness to racial identity.

I think having the confidence to talk to a police officer is a product of gender, race, and sexuality, where only cisgender, heterosexual, White men (and some women) do not look back on history and feel threatened by police. While Colin did not mention what class he grew up in, the fact that he attended private Catholic schools for all of primary and secondary school signifies to me that he was surrounded by upper-class people who may have seen the police as protectors. Despite his friend's reaction to his comfort around the police, Colin doesn't seem aware of or concerned by the legacy of violence attributed to police in the US.

My own perspective is quite contrary to his, despite being a cisgender, White woman. In February 2020 when a drug counselor at DRCSD asked me in front of a health class what I thought of police, I responded with "They're not on my team." At that moment, I was thinking about the cruel ways in which police in the US have addressed sexual violence and in some cases discredited the survivors. I was also thinking about the Special Police who were positioned outside of my apartment for five days when I was living in Western China just to scare me. After the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, I started learning much more about racialized police violence in the US. I can't imagine talking to a police officer by choice, even if I'd probably be okay as a White woman.

Claudia's early experiences with people of color were different from her experiences with gender in that she rarely came in contact with people of color before college.

I can't really say when my first memory was of racial identity. Again, I kind of needed something to contrast that with to really be aware of it. So I would say it's probably more like watching an old movie where there were black people. I think it was the movie Pollyanna or something. I asked my parents, "Are we Black?" And they were like, "No, we're not." I do recall when I was working my first job when I was 16 in rural Minnesota, where it's extremely White, very German, and a Black man came to the checkout. At that point, I can probably count on one hand the number of black people I had seen in real life and I just thought that was kind of remarkable. He's very pleasant. But yeah, I kind of needed the other to make sense of who I was in the broader context.

Returning to Claudia's previous statement about not being changed by people, but becoming more open to their experiences, it appears to me that she took these interactions with Black people at face value. She was able to recognize that she had White skin, but it is unclear if she has started to acknowledge the privileges that come with Whiteness or the structural racism that underlies the impoverished Black communities in Cleveland, Ohio where she went to college.

And then racial identity, well, that's funny because I come from South Central Minnesota where it's primarily German and Swedish people. And so I never really thought about race much because there wasn't really any place to witness a different culture, a different way of being. When I moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where there is a large black community and a lot of it's very impoverished, there I became much more aware of it. I wouldn't say it really changed anything about me. I am just open to these other people's experiences.

Claudia's final words in this sentence are notable. Her exposure to masculinity in contrast to her femininity, male bodies in contrast to female bodies, and Black people in contrast to White people raised her awareness of difference but did not change her relationship with herself. It might be that, as I discussed in terms of Ginny and Esther's racial identities, her identities would have to come in conflict with a boundary to begin critically interrogating them.

Colin describes experiencing a "glimmer of awareness to racial identity" through his interactions with his friend. Claudia mentions her increased awareness of the

impoverished black community in Cleveland but, as with her classmates' experimentation with queer gender and sexual identities, awareness and exposure did not change anything beyond clarifying her own identities. As such neither Colin nor Claudia was pushed to interrogate their Whiteness through these experiences.

Enacting Agency through Masculine/Feminine Expression

As I continue thinking about all these participants' experiences, I am beginning to notice that people tend to question their normative identities only if they come in contact with a test of those identities. For me, my racial identities were tested by living in China and returning to the US. For Gabi, her Jewish identity was tested by moving to Minnesota. Joseph Levitt and Todd both faced conflicting information about masculinity at home and at school that pushed them towards finding new ways to be masculine. Colin and Claudia faced these tests when their expressions of masculinity and femininity came in conflict with the religious doctrines that they were taught. In this section, I will look more closely at how Colin and Claudia enact agency by pushing back against boundaries around masculinity and femininity within the cisgender identities to which they ascribe.

Colin describes a hidden curriculum around gender that underlies structures within his schooling, including prioritizing football and the very fact that he attended an all-boys high school. His initial rejection of the hegemonic form of masculinity supported by his Catholic schools came in the form of idolizing runners over football players.

I think I am not alone in this but even with dudes like me who align fairly closely to the masculine stereotypes, there are individual ideas that kind of rubbed me the wrong way or that I would explicitly say forget that, you know? I think sports are connected to masculinity I think I can just make that generalization and I went to a football High School, right? The football players were gods. It was a ton of money poured into athletics in general but also football. In high school, though athletically I, instead of having any desire at all to play football ever, idolized the

runners, especially the distance runners, those tiny skinny guys who could just run forever, but you blow on them and they fall over. So, in hindsight, I will call that the beginnings of a rejection of a small but significant component of the way masculinity was taught to me.

By choosing to idolize male athletes who were outside of what he considered traditional masculinity, Colin began pushing on the boundaries around gender expression enacted within his school's hidden curriculum. He, like Todd, has continued to enact agency through his rejection of masculinity in its current forms without finding a masculine identity that works for him.

[RH] "What is masculinity to you?"

[C] "I would rather toss the whole idea out because I cannot tease it apart from a whole bunch of the usual toxicity that people reference. I mean, I can list the stereotypes that I am aware of - bench pressing a lot of weight and driving a Jeep or a truck or something. Well, I used to drive a Jeep. The high number of sexual partners right. I am drawing a blank here but there's a set of stereotypes that tend... Oh, drinking lots of beer right? Wine is girly, beer is manly somehow. These are stereotypes but this is my picture of what masculinity is. I am not sure that I've read enough to describe a more healthy package. That is messing with me because I am not sure I would want to arrange it into a package. And you know, the general impressions that I've gotten from folks who try to study less healthy versus more healthy concepts of masculinity, my kind of blunt takeaway is, let's just toss the whole thing out. I get the impression that a lot of folks that I have stumbled across, I say stumbled across because I've not done purposeful research, are writing for an audience of dudes that they feel they need to coddle. The authors feel the need to coddle and gently introduced to the idea that when we say toxic masculinity, it doesn't mean you are bad as a man, it just means there's certain you know... and then the takeaways tend to be the very gentle suggestion that "Hey, you've been trying this thing that's less helpful and maybe limiting on you and you know, harmful for others, etc. Let's try this instead." But my general takeaway is like, "Yeah, so let's just not take this particular set of characteristics, whether it's driving a manly car or benching a lot or whatever and like put it into a package." Let's just not bother, you know. Anyway, that's, I think where I am at right now.

Colin's struggle to list stereotypes about masculinity is interesting to me, in part because he stated early on in the interview that he feels like he fits the classic package of masculinity fairly well. Contrary to his self-description, I had always assumed that he had

formed his own alternative masculinity, being someone who loves to dance, climb, and drink wine. Here, he begins to challenge both toxic masculinity and how authors write about alternative masculinities in ways that coddle men. Colin would rather not be limited by the notion of masculinity or the boundaries that anyone places around what masculinity can look like.

While Claudia often describes herself as being by the book and accepting the boundaries around who she can be maintained by her family and religious community, she pushes back against certain boundaries around gender roles.

Yeah, so again, my family is very religious on both sides. I am still a practicing Christian. But I see that a lot of things around say gender roles or gender expression were definitely more cultural than they are scriptural. I've read the scriptures over a million times. It's like they take the worst possible interpretation of these Scriptures and try to use it to, you know, confine women's roles. And that just never sat with me well. From a young age, I've always been independent and not good at taking instructions. But yeah, I still hang on to a lot of traditions from faith. I still intend to be married in a more egalitarian mindset. So I've kind of adapted it, I've hung on to it, but I've adapted it to what I think is the best fitting for my life and is still in line with what God intended.

Claudia believes that many of the confining boundaries around gender roles or gender expressions are more culturally bound than religiously bound. She, therefore, has chosen to leave the church that her family attends, interpret the scriptures in her own way, and live within the boundaries of the scriptures but outside of her family's boundaries.

Perhaps leaving home for college and creating physical distance between herself and her community was a starting point for this change.

I was the first girl in my family to move away from home to go to college. And that was something I had to really fight my parents on. They really wanted to keep me close and shelter me, because not only 600 miles away, but my other sisters only moved to Minneapolis two hours away, or they stayed at home while they were going through college. My parents would have been much more comfortable

if I had simply stayed where they could watch me and guide my decisions. But, it turned out well. I think they're fairly happy with what I did with myself.

Claudia's use of the words "where they could watch me and guide my decisions"

indicates a form of boundary maintenance enacted by her parents. They clearly played an active role in ensuring that their daughters remain within the proscribed gender roles and live with proper religiosity. By placing more physical distance between herself and her family, Claudia gave herself more space in which to develop a femininity of her own that balances equality with her readings of the scripture.

[RH] How about experiences that maybe constrained your expressions and some of your identities?

[C] I can't really think of any external forces that do that because I internalized from a fairly young age who I was and that hasn't really been shaken by anything. I've kind of always been self-regulating about who I want to be and I have not really gone exploring I should say. So yeah, you could say some of my restraints are religious, but that's something I've chosen for myself, and it's not something anyone else puts on me.

Claudia's choice to live within the bounds of her interpretations of Christian scriptures is an expression of agency. She has rejected the cultural interpretation maintained by her family but has chosen to live with religiosity.

On Being White, Christian Cisgender People

Family and religious-based schooling played significant roles in Colin and Claudia's initial understandings of identity possibilities. It was within these spaces that they learned accepted forms of masculinity and femininity, which were tied to cisgender heterosexuality. They only became aware of racial differences through interactions with People of Color, including friends, customers, and Colin's mother's implicit racism. Claudia and Colin's experiences defining themselves in relation to People of Color aligns with Lensmire's (2014) observations about White men understanding their Whiteness in

relation to People of Color. While Lensmire's (2014) participants often imagined People of Color as dangerous, Colin and Claudia discussed Black individuals as “very pleasant” or in terms of guilt for enacting microaggressions. However, they still use People of Color, both real and imagined, to create their White racial identities and rarely draw connections between their Whiteness and their experiences in the world during their life story interviews.

Both Colin and Claudia enact agency through their choices to reject or renegotiate the religious boundaries that initially formed the framework within which their identities were developed. Colin has rejected Catholicism and associated masculine identity possibilities completely. Colin’s rejection of masculinity, similar to Todd’s, illustrates his positioning of “I as Marginalized Outsider” (Kahn et al., 2011). Kahn et al. (2011) find that separation from masculinity as a whole often stems from negative experiences related to masculinity. In Colin’s case, experiences with hegemonic masculinity in his schooling and gendered expectations based in Catholicism may have caused him to reject available masculine identity possibilities.

Claudia has rejected cultural boundaries around gender roles disguised as religion maintained by her extended family. Instead, she has left her childhood church and has developed her identities within religious boundaries of her choosing. Claudia’s direct discussion of maintaining religious values by choice indicates to me that she has had to defend this aspect of her identities before, pushing up against boundaries around who can be religious and who can be empowered.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusions

The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.

- Lorde (2012, p. 44)

Throughout the previous four chapters, we have read about the converging and diverging experiences of Esther, Gabi, Ginny, Joseph Levitt, Todd, Maurice, Cassandra, Claudia, and Colin as they formed their gender, sexual, and racial identities. At this point, I will return to my original research questions to draw together findings from the past four chapters. My overarching question is: How do young people engage with identity possibilities enacted by family, schooling, and social media as they construct their racial, gender, and sexual identities? I broke this question into smaller points as follows:

1. How are boundaries around possible identities for young people defined and maintained in varying spaces throughout their lives?
2. How do young people enact agency in their expressions of identity within these spaces?

I approached these questions through an intersectional analysis involving relationality through co-formation. Specifically, I analyzed one set of student interviews (Esther's) and nine life story interviews, including my own, looking at how family power relations, school power relations, student hierarchy, and social media power relations defined and maintained boundaries around identity possibilities and how participants engaged with these boundaries.

Engaging with boundaries around identity possibilities

Young people have complex and intersecting identities that are formed in relationship with the boundaries that they and others define and maintain. Aligning with past research, the most pronounced spaces in which participants experienced boundary maintenance activities were at home and in school where adults in positions of power modeled often cis-heteronormative identity possibilities for young people with less power (Martin, 1983; O'Loughlin & Van Zile, 2014; Pascoe, 2007; Prior, 2013). Within the school setting, both adult and student participants often return to the themes of bullying, name-calling, and joking among classmates as forms of boundary maintenance (Pascoe, 2007). In this section, I will summarize my findings and draw relationships between the experiences of the participants and scholarly literature in four sections – boundaries at home, boundaries in primary and secondary school, breaking boundaries in college, and identity possibilities on social media.

Boundaries at Home

Several participants identified parents as one of their initial sources of information on identity possibilities and how to express them. Parents often modeled gender expressions and racial identities for their children while also treating them as if they fit within assumed boundaries of identity possibilities (O'Loughlin & Van Zile, 2014). This is particularly evident in Claudia's recollections of her mother dressing her up in frilly clothing and her father and brothers modeling masculinities. Parents taught about sexual identities in less direct ways, often through comments about their desire for future grandchildren or criticism of gender expression among queer people. Perhaps parents'

timidness to address sexuality was, as Prior (2013) observed, a product of adults' discomfort about youth sexuality.

Many participants in this study are from distinct racial and ethnic backgrounds, which define their own boundaries around gender, sexual, and racial identities. Parents often conveyed religious and cultural messages to participants that they engaged with in different ways. Joseph Levitt and Todd recalled how their parents directly laid out expectations around their children's expressions of Vietnamese and Taiwanese cultures respectively. The clear expectations of their parents influenced how Joseph Levitt and Todd saw themselves as Asian American men. Todd, who described his parents' perspectives as aligning with the Model Minority stereotype, seems to have carried many of their lessons on how to be an Asian man with him through college. In contrast, Joseph Levitt critically interrogated the ways his parents expected him to enact Vietnamese culture, accepting some aspects such as language and food, and rejecting other aspects including misogynistic gender dynamics.

Some participants, like Joseph Levitt, accepted select boundaries defined and maintained by their parents, while pushing against or expanding others. Gabi, for instance, embraced many of the values that she was taught by her Jewish grandmother and her parents who supported her development as an independent woman. However, she was also conscious of their homophobic and racist comments and jokes, which have caused her to pause and analyze her thought processes around racial and sexual identities today. Claudia, similarly, embraced Christian religion but rejected her family's interpretation of the scriptures, particularly when it came to gender roles. This critical engagement with identity possibilities superimposed on participants by their parents

illustrates points made by O'Loughlin & Van Zile (2014) and Prior (2013) who argue that young people are both conscious of and capable of resisting boundaries defined by their parents.

In addition to reinforcing the findings of other scholars, I find that the wider environment in which participants grew up influenced the degree to which they internalized or resisted boundaries maintained by their parents. For instance, while Joseph Levitt and Todd received similar lessons from their parents, they responded to these lessons in different ways. Surrounded by other Asian Americans, Todd internalized and maintained boundaries around Asian American identities reflecting his parents' reinforcement of the Model Minority stereotype and American Dream. Growing up in a predominantly White area, Joseph Levitt saw his parents' expectations around his Vietnamese cultural expressions as a hindrance and eventually redefined his Vietnamese American identity to better match his own needs.

Boundaries in Primary and Secondary School

As suggested in previous research, schools are spaces in which boundaries around identity possibilities are defined and maintained through formal and hidden curricula (Bettie, 2014; H. A. Giroux, 1983; Lee, 2009; Martin, 1983; Pascoe, 2012; Ramirez et al., 2016). Adult participants observed some instances of the hidden curriculum embedded in school structures, socializing young people to adopt certain norms and identity possibilities (Apple & King, 1983; H. A. Giroux, 1983; Martin, 1983). This was particularly clear in topical exclusions from curricula including the lack of Asian American history and culture in Todd's predominantly Asian American schools and the lack of information about gender, sexuality, and race in Colin's Catholic schools. In

Todd's case, this may have contributed to his early acceptance of the Model Minority stereotype and his lack of a politicized understanding of Asian Americans in general. For Colin, this meant that he had to learn about diverse identity possibilities later in life through exposure to difference.

While the hidden curriculum is often highlighted in the literature, I found that adult participants and student participants from DRCSD mainly focused on student-student boundary maintenance behaviors. When I think back on my own education, I also recall my relationships with classmates and the harm that we did to each other much more strongly than my experiences with teachers. Esther, Todd, Maurice, and Colin described the use of homophobic, misogynistic, and racial slurs, mainly used by students expressing forms of hegemonic masculinity to maintain their dominance. This is similar to the findings of Dalley-Trim (2007), Kehily (2001), and Pascoe (2007) who study young people's expressions of masculinities and femininities at school.

In addition to the boundary maintenance behaviors often described by researchers, participants in this study discussed more direct events that taught them about identity boundaries. Classmates observed how participants of this study transgressed boundaries around identity expression and commented on these transgressions. For instance, a female student embarrassed Joseph Levitt by pointing out that his painted nails were feminine. In another case, Ginny's friend made fun of her gender expression by dressing like her for a week. When it came to Asianness, Joseph Levitt's classmates drew and maintained very clear boundaries, which led to his labeling as "White" Asian due to his participation in AP classes and his disinterest in breakdancing and street racing. While many participants experienced boundary maintenance activities enacted by classmates,

the impacts on each individual were very different, with some participants transgressing these boundaries and constructing their own identities within the borderlands while other participants suppressed the parts of themselves that diverged from the proscribed boundaries.

While much of what participants of this study described aligns well with studies on hidden curriculum and research on gender identities in schools, very few studies have looked at both the impacts of both hidden curriculum and student-student boundary maintenance. Therefore, this study contributes to research on boundaries in school by finding that participants highlighted the impacts of student-student interactions over the hidden curriculum. In fact, only Todd and Colin acknowledged hidden curricula, while most participants discussed interactions with students and, in some cases, teachers. This signifies to me that more attention should be placed on interrupting boundary maintenance behaviors among students.

Breaking Boundaries in College

While adult participants described boundary maintenance behaviors during primary and secondary school, they often identified college as central to their identity development. Ginny, Colin, and Maurice discussed how coming in contact with people who expressed a broader range of gender and sexual identities allowed them to better understand themselves. Ginny and Maurice were able to start experimenting with their sexuality, thereby affirming their pansexual identities. Gabi and Claudia became more conscious of race due to the locations of their colleges, and in Gabi's case, the courses that she chose to take. Joseph Levitt built skills in introspection that helped him to develop his current identities. These are the realities that several DRCS students

discussed wishing they could begin enjoying during middle and high school, where a lack of diversity limits the number of identity possibilities to which students are exposed.

While many participants discuss college as a space for learning about and expressing new identity possibilities, some participants still faced significant boundaries throughout college. Maurice, for instance, began expressing their agender and pansexual identities but struggled to have their they/them pronouns respected by classmates. Until the last semester of college, Cassandra continued to experience gender dysphoria while occupying male spaces due to the initial shocked response of her parents to her coming out as transgender.

Identity Possibilities on Social Media

Adult participants including Maurice, Cassandra, Todd, and Ginny described turning to the internet, where they found information and examples of identity possibilities through YouTube vlogs, porn, Tumblr, and fanfiction. Their sources of information are parallel to those found by Cho (2018) and Jenzen (2017), whose participants preferred Tumblr and trans participants, in particular, learned about the process of transitioning on YouTube vlogs. Esther, who is still in high school, relies on more “mainstream” social media sites – Twitter and TikTok- for learning about feminism and queerness. Perhaps she feels safe in these spaces due to her positioning as a White, cisgender woman.

Esther, Maurice, and Cassandra also use social media spaces to express their identities. Esther shares her self-confidence, environmentalism, and feminism on her Instagram, Snapchat, VSCO, and Twitter. Cassandra and Maurice post about experiences with their identities in society, sharing both the ups and downs of being transgender and

agender on Facebook, which runs counter to the findings of Cho (2018) and Jenzen (2017) who found that many queer participants prefer other social media platforms.

Several participants, including Gabi and Joseph Levitt, also indicated that they have changed the ways they use Facebook and Instagram due to the negative messaging that is present there. However, they still participate in specific communities where they feel they can learn to be better allies. Negative messaging on Facebook and Instagram also perpetuates boundaries, as in Todd's experience in which a certain type of gay man was recognized as the most desirable.

Enacting Agency in Negotiation of Boundaries

Although the boundaries around young peoples' identities are maintained by many actors in many different spaces, the participants of this study all discussed ways in which they transgressed, resisted, or evaded these boundaries. Much of the research on youth agency that I found within critical youth studies is theoretical, so the ways in which agency is enacted are less frequently discussed than the nature of boundaries that restrict agency. In this section, I will discuss four ways in which participants enact agency – rejecting and pursuing alternative forms of masculinity and femininity, expressing identities that transgress boundaries, staying silent about sexual identities, and engaging in activism.

Rejecting and Pursuing Alternative Forms of Masculinity and Femininity

All cisgender participants of this study who encountered strong boundaries around expressions of masculinity or femininity at home or at school shared a rejection of these boundaries. Claudia rejected the femininity, and particularly gender roles, maintained by her family and religious community and now engages in religious and secular spaces

more focused on gender equality. Joseph Levitt positioned himself as “authentic definer” and enacted agency in his choice to reject the misogynistic Vietnamese masculinity that his father expected of him and the hegemonic masculinity perpetuated by his classmates in favor of a softer form of masculinity (Kahn et al., 2011). Todd and Colin both enacted agency in their choices to reject the hegemonic masculinity defined and maintained by their classmates and hidden curricula. Unlike Joseph Levitt, they positioned themselves as “marginalized outsiders” and have not redefined their masculinity, but live as cisgender men without a defined masculine expression (Kahn et al., 2011). This trend indicates to me that, while masculinities are the identities that are often seen as defining and maintaining boundaries around gender and sexual identities (see Dalley-Trim, 2007; Pascoe, 2007), these identities are also easiest to transgress. As Todd and Colin observe, finding models of more positive masculinities, however, remains difficult.

Expressing Identities that Transgress Boundaries

Participants engaged in two different types of identity expression through clothing. Gabi, Esther, and Ginny expressed a form of androgyny or masculinity that signaled both their bisexual identities and their comfort as cisgender women. Maurice and Cassandra expressed their agender and transgender identities through clothing as a visual marker of these identities.

In both cases, clothing took on meaning. For Gabi, Esther, and Ginny, enacting agency through dressing as they pleased gave them the flexibility to redefine femininity for themselves. In Maurice’s case, enacting agency in their choice to wear a gold sequined suit at a dance event finally prompted their inclusion in the Lindy Hop community, which had so often rejected them for not playing the role of Black,

cisgender, heterosexual dancer. Cassandra makes her gender clear and expresses her femininity through dressing in vintage 1940s style dresses, curling her hair, and wearing makeup. These participants enact agency through public displays of their gender identities as agender, transwoman, or masculine woman.

Staying Silent about Sexual Identities

Gabi, Esther, Ginny, and I appear to be White, cisgender, heterosexual women. In a heteronormative society, we have the privilege of choosing whether to share our queer sexual identities. There is debate within the queer community as to whether bisexual, pansexual, or asexual people are privileged due to their ability to pass as straight in many situations (see <https://bi.org/en/articles/the-myth-of-straight-passing-privilege>). Passing as straight or choosing not to come out has both positive and negative impacts. While Gabi and Esther describe staying silent about their bisexuality in certain spaces to avoid negative interactions, passing as straight also contributes to the invisibility of asexual, pansexual, and bisexual individuals. I have found that there is less information by and for asexual, bisexual, and pansexual individuals than for gay, lesbian, or transgender individuals both in mainstream popular media and queer media.

I am not arguing that asexual, bisexual, or pansexual individuals have privilege over other queer individuals for any reason, but rather that having the choice to come out at all is a privilege. Our Whiteness means that if we choose to be open about our queer identities, we will likely face fewer boundaries than queer People of Color (see <https://archermagazine.com.au/2017/07/culture-coming-out/>). Our positioning in liberal families means that we are unlikely to lose our social safety nets if we come out. As White, cisgender, heterosexual women from liberal families, staying silent about our

sexual identities is strategic rather than necessary. That is the privilege of choosing whether to come out.

Engaging in Activism

The fourth way in which these young people enacted agency was through engaging in activism. Both Joseph Levitt and Todd engage in racial activism, albeit in different ways. Joseph Levitt participates in protests and community service in Black spaces while recognizing that his Asian American identity means that his experiences differ greatly from those of the people he is working to support. Todd, on the other hand, engages in Asian American activist groups and sees racial activism as addressing intersectional issues that affect all People of Color. Cassandra and Maurice use Facebook and other social media platform to engage in activism through sharing their experiences with gender expression in US society. Cassandra challenges her followers to critically interrogate the boundaries that they maintain around gender expressions. Maurice discusses their experiences in Minnesota as a Black, agender individual, particularly in relation to racism and cisgenderism in their workplace.

Beyond Boundaries and Agency

While this study focuses mainly on how young people engage with boundaries maintained in various spaces and enact agency in their expressions of identities within these spaces, several notable findings do not fall into the categories of boundaries and agency. This section attends to the invisibility of Whiteness and foregrounding of certain identities depending on social spaces.

Invisibility of Whiteness

Among White, cisgender participants in this study, there was a trend in not discussing their Whiteness. For instance, Ginny and Esther discuss a lack of diversity in their schools and a need to be exposed to People of Color, but they do not address their racial identities as White people. Similarly, Colin and Claudia describe instances in which they learned about racial differences through interactions with People of Color. However, they do not discuss any critical interrogation of their own Whiteness prompted by these interactions. This finding aligns with those of Lensmire (2014) who observes that White men theorize their Whiteness in contrast to People of Color. Unlike the participants in Lensmire's (2014) study, none of the participants of this study described or imagined People of Color as dangerous, but rather they used interactions with People of Color to better understand themselves.

However, White, cisgender people who have confronted boundaries around their racial identities tend to analyze their Whiteness more critically. This is true in the case of Gabi, who analyzes her Jewish and White identities after experiencing reactions of discomfort to her jokes about Jewish people by White people in Minnesota. This indicates that White people may need to come in conflict with boundaries around Whiteness before they can critically interrogate what Whiteness is and how they enact it.

Foregrounding of Identities

Another theme common among participants in this study was a foregrounding of certain identities depending on social spaces. For instance, Todd foregrounds his Asian American identity in Minnesota where he is a minority, whereas he expresses a belief that if he were still in the Bay Area, he would have more examples of how to be a queer,

cisgender, Asian American man. In contrast to Todd, Cassandra foregrounds her transgender and lesbian identities and only discusses race in terms of her parents who are White and Chinese.

One explanation for this foregrounding of certain identities is that it is a way for people with more than one marginalized identity to remain visible. As Anzaldúa (2012) and Lorde (2012) reiterate throughout their writings, having multiple marginalized identities means that one is invisible in every community. Instead, one lives in the borderlands (Anzaldúa, 2012). According to the intersectional invisibility framework, both Todd and Cassandra are invisible due to their multiple marginalized identities (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). However, if Todd places his Asian American identity first and engages in racial activism, he can maintain an Asian American community without the added marginalized dimension of being queer. In contrast, Cassandra is more likely to find a community with queer and transgender people, thus foregrounding these identities.

Implications for Schooling

Young people have enacted boundary maintenance behaviors for as long as we can remember. Colin, who went to school in the 1980s and 90s, and students at DRCS who are in school in 2021 recall bullying behaviors, despite decades of anti-bullying efforts. However, while many adult participants in this study reflected on how students maintained boundaries around identity possibilities through bullying behaviors and rarely mentioned teachers, students at DRCS in 2020 describe finding trusted teachers to be the safest resources for them at school. Esther, for example, describes eating lunch in a teacher's classroom every day because this teacher has created a space where she feels

comfortable being herself. The simplest way for a teacher to create a safe space is by listening without judgement. Many students also described keeping their backpacks in cubbies in their teachers' rooms or lounging on furniture in the classrooms, creating a more home-like environment. Students' preferences for teachers' classrooms over spaces like the hallways and cafeteria indicates to me that perhaps we should provide teachers with more resources and training to create welcoming classroom spaces. In addition, we should switch our focus from anti-bullying among students to equity training among educators who may create boundary-spanning spaces for young people. In this way, both teachers and students may benefit from making classrooms go-to spaces for students to discuss and affirm their identities.

In addition to being comforting presences in schools, teachers may take on the role of introducing a large variety of identity possibilities into their classrooms in conscious and thoughtful ways. Several participants discussed a lack of diversity in their schools that limited their exposure to identity possibilities. For instance, Ginny recalled that the homogeneity of her school did not cause her to feel closed off but did mean that she did not interact with people with diverse identities until she got to college. Esther also acknowledges the lack of diversity at DRCS D, where she and her friends contribute the most "flavor". She and other student participants mentioned a desire for DRCS D educators to bring in more people of diverse identities to expose students to "the other" and potentially reduce biases caused by a lack of exposure. In places with fairly homogenous populations, teaching subject-based lessons that incorporate people with different identities into their content may give students the information that they need to begin developing their own identities. In addition, teachers, schools, and districts could

select textbooks that take an inclusive and intersectional stance, thus providing students with more information about identity possibilities. Schools could also engage more with their surrounding communities, supporting students through community-based projects, and inviting people from the community to share their experiences with students. This school-community connection could help to transform boundaries around students' identity possibilities both at school and in community.

Implications for Teacher Training

Claiming that we should focus more on equity training with educators is one thing, but envisioning how that training might happen is another. As an educator and former teacher trainer, I see many possibilities for carrying the findings of this dissertation research into teacher preparation and professional development. In fact, the life stories shared and analyzed in this dissertation could, in themselves, be used as material for discussion among current and future teachers.

During the 2020-2021 school year, teachers at DRCSD came together with teachers of a local private school to form an equity and diversity committee that meets monthly. Committee members plan activities, invite speakers, and have discussions around issues of equity and diversity. I was invited to present my findings from DRCSD to the committee and we discussed ways to create an even more welcoming learning environment for students. Ongoing communities of practice such as this equity and diversity committee have been found to have long-lasting impacts on members' personal practice (Desimone et al., 2003; Weinberg et al., 2021; Wenger, 2000). Therefore, I would encourage interested educators to come together and create similar groups to learn

about and discuss structural inequalities, Whiteness, and other issues pertaining to equity and diversity at local and national levels.

Preservice teachers should learn more than just the hard skill of teaching, such as theories, approaches, and lesson planning. In my teacher preparation program, we balanced these hard skills with research and discussion about the imperialist history of the spread of English language and its impact on people around the world. We discussed the pain of multilingualism, multiculturalism, and losing a sense of belonging anywhere. We also learned to teach students who had experienced trauma before arriving in the US. Extending these experiences to more general preparation, preservice teachers could, for example, read and discuss the findings chapters of this dissertation and then identify commonalities between their experiences and those of the participants. Teacher trainers could also organize communities of practice among preservice teachers that they could continue engaging with after entering schools, thus resulting in a more lasting impact.

Recommendations for Future Studies

After conducting this study, I have recommendations for both methodological considerations and future areas of study.

Methods

This study has been both difficult and rewarding. While in DRCSD, I realized that the research methods I had chosen were not particularly fruitful. Very few students were interested in keeping a social media diary and the interviews related to social media were often only around ten minutes long. Participants were more responsive and engaged with

the photovoice activity, but the interviews were still short. In future studies, I would focus only on the photovoice activity, offering each participant more training and taking more time to develop a set of questions together to direct the topics of each photo, thus leading to more fruitful and involved interviews.

As for adult participants, I had hoped that they would remain involved throughout the process of data collection and analysis. However, many participants did not respond to their narratives after I sent them. In future research, I will ask more follow-up questions during the initial interviews so that I feel confident that I am sharing participants' stories accurately if they do not remain active throughout the entire research project.

Future Areas of Study

I see the findings of this study as wide-ranging and interesting in several ways. In relation to boundaries, there are opportunities to delve deeper into boundary maintenance at school, particularly concerning student-student interactions and the hidden curriculum. While this study indicates that young people are more influenced by their classmates, more information is needed in this area.

In terms of research on agency, more research on choices around identity expression is needed. I find the choice to stay silent about sexual identities at school particularly interesting in terms of educational research. I also see opportunities for educational research on young people's foregrounding of certain identities over others and the invisibility of Whiteness, which could inform diversity, equity, and inclusion work within schools.

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Appendix A. Consent and Assent Forms

Title of Research Study: **From Their Own Eyes: Student Experiences with Gender and Sexuality in Schools**

Investigator: Rose Hyson

Supported By:

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking your child to take part in this research study because you are the parent of a child from Lake Placid Central School who has expressed interest in participating.

What should I know about being in a research study?

- Whether or not your child takes part is up to you and your child.
- You can choose not to have your child take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not affect your relationship or your child's relationship with the school, teaching staff, or administration.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to?

For questions about research appointments, the research study, research results, or other concerns, call the study team at:

Researcher Name: Joan DeJaeghere Researcher Affiliation: University of Minnesota Phone Number: 612-626-8258 Email Address: deja0003@umn.edu	Researcher Name: Rose Hyson Researcher Affiliation: University of Minnesota Phone Number: 518-637-6919 Email Address: hyson003@umn.edu
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This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (ETHICAL REVIEW BOARD) within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your or your child's research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 (toll free: 1-888-224-8636) or go to <https://research.umn.edu/units/hrpp/research-participants/questions-concerns>. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your or your child's rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research is to learn more about youth experiences coming of age in schools and on social media in order to reduce bullying and improve the learning

environment for all students. This study will benefit both students and the school administration because it will allow students to share what is really happening at school and this information will help the administration to address bullying more effectively.

How long will the research last?

We expect that your child's participation in this research study will last one month, including two activities and three 45-minute interviews.

How many children will be studied?

We expect about 40 children will be in this research study, with 20 participants from your school.

What happens if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research"?

If you allow your child to participate in this study, they will:

1. Take 20 pictures around the school
2. Talk about these pictures with Rose for a maximum of 45 minutes
3. Write a social media diary for one week
4. Talk with Rose about their social media diary
5. Participate in an interview with Rose after attending their sexuality education lessons in health class.

Where will this research happen?

1. All research activities and interviews will happen at school.
2. Interviews will be done in a quiet place in the school.

Will interviews be recorded?

1. I will ask your child if they would like to have their interview recorded or if they would prefer that I take notes.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You and your child may decline to participate, and it will not affect your relationship with the school in any way. You can also choose to let your child participate in only part of the study (photography project, photo journal, sexuality education interview).

What happens if I say "Yes", but I change my mind later?

You and your child can leave the research at any time and it will not affect your relationship with the school in any way.

If you decide to leave the research, contact the investigator so that the investigator can ask your child to stop participating.

Choosing not to be in this study or to stop being in this study will not result in any penalty to you or loss of benefit to which your child is entitled.

At any time, you or your child may decide to withdraw from the study. If you withdraw, no more information will be collected from you or your child.

What are the risks? Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me or my child? There are no risks for participating in this study.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to ensure the security, anonymity, and confidentiality of your child's personal information, including research study records, and data will be shown only to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy, but children who participate will have their data saved under new names that they have chosen. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the ETHICAL REVIEW BOARD and other representatives of this institution. The recorded conversation (if your child agrees to be recorded) is for data analysis purposes only. Quotes taken from interviews may be used in publications and presentations, but your child's name will not be associated with what they say.

Data will be stored in secured files and will not be shared with anyone. Quotations may be taken from the data for use in publications and presentations but will be cited under the new name that your child has chosen for this research.

We will not ask your child about child abuse, but if you tell us about child [or vulnerable adult] abuse or neglect, we may be required or permitted by law or policy to report to authorities.

Will I have a chance to provide feedback after the study is over?

If you would like to share feedback, please contact the study team or the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP). See the "Who Can I Talk To?" section of this form for study team and HRPP contact information.

What else do I need to know?

Parents please be aware that under the Protection of Pupils Right Act 20 U.S.C. Section 1232 (c)(1)(A), you have the right to review a copy of the questions asked of or materials that will be used with your students. If you would like to do so, you should contact Rose Hyson to obtain a copy of the questions or materials.

Your signature documents your permission for the named child to take part in this research.

Printed name of child participant

Printed name of parent [] or guardian [] Date
to consent for the child to participate

Signature of parent [] or guardian [] Date
to consent for the child to participate

Signature of person obtaining consent and assent Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent and assent

University of Minnesota
Assent to Participate in Research

Title of Research Study: **From Their Own Eyes: Student Experiences with Gender and Sexuality in Schools**

Researcher: Rose Hyson

Sponsor:

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

A research study is a way of learning about how things work. You are being asked if you want to do activities for this research study because you are a student in this school.

What should I know about being in a research study?

You do not have to do these activities if you do not want to do so. It is up to you if you want to join and if you want to, talk to your parents about any questions you have about the study. You can choose not to join now and change your mind later if you want. If you decide you do not want to be in this study, no one will be mad at you. You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Why is this research being done?

In this study, I want to find out more about how you make sense of your identity and how you experience (or do not experience) bullying.

How long will the research last?

Your activities will take one month, including two activities and three interviews that will take one class period each.

What happens if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research”?

If it is okay with you and you join this study, you will be asked to take twenty photos, write a social media diary for a week, and participate in three interviews with me.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

The researcher will only share what she learns, including notes and interviews, with people who need to review her work. For example, sometimes researchers need to share information with the University to make sure they are following the rules. We

will not ask you about child abuse, but if you tell us about child abuse or neglect, we may be required or permitted by law or policy to report to authorities.

What else do I need to know?

You can always ask to stop if you want to.

I will not ask you questions about child abuse or neglect. If you choose to tell me about it, I will need to report it to someone.

Who can I talk to?

You can ask these two people questions about the research:

Researcher Name: Joan DeJaeghere Researcher Affiliation: University of Minnesota Phone Number: 612-626-8258 Email Address: deja0003@umn.edu	Researcher Name: Rose Hyson Researcher Affiliation: University of Minnesota Phone Number: 518-637-6919 Email Address: hyson003@umn.edu
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This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (ETHICAL REVIEW BOARD), a group of people that look at the research before it starts. This group is part of the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP). To share concerns privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at [612-625-1650](tel:612-625-1650) (Toll Free: 1-888-224-8636) or go to z.umn.edu/participants. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team or your parents.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide feedback about this research.

Optional Elements:

Being recorded is optional, meaning that you do not have to agree to being recorded to join the research study. Place your initials by each statement below to let us know if you are okay having your voice recorded when we talk.

I agree I disagree

_____ _____ The researcher may record my voice to help do the research. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the immediate study team, University, or other people that need to for the research.

Signature Block for Child Assent

Signature of child

Date

Printed name of child

Printed name of person obtaining assent

Date

Signature of person obtaining assent

Title of Research Study: **From Their Own Eyes: Youth Experiences Making Sense of Identities**

Investigator Team Contact Information:

For questions about research appointments, the research study, research results, or other concerns, call the study team at:

Advisor Name: Joan DeJaeghere Advisor Affiliation: University of Minnesota Phone Number: 612-626-8258 Email Address: deja0003@umn.edu	Student Investigator Name: Rose Hyson Phone Number: 518-637-6919 Email Address: hyson003@umn.edu
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Key Information About This Research Study

The following is a short summary to help you decide whether or not to be a part of this research study. More detailed information is listed later on in this form.

What is research?

- The goal of research is to learn new things in order to help people in the future. Investigators learn things by following the same plan with a number of participants, so they do not usually make changes to the plan for individual research participants. You, as an individual, may or may not be helped by volunteering for a research study.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you are a member of the Lindy Hop/Balboa community who is interested in sharing about how you developed your current gender, sexual, and racial identities and how schooling and social media have influenced your identities over time.

What should I know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research is to learn more about your experiences making sense of and expressing your gender identities, sexual orientations, and racial identities. In addition, I'll be looking specifically at how schooling and social media have impacted your identity development over time.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for one approximately two-hour interview.

What will I need to do to participate?

You will talk with Rose about how you came to understand and express your current identities.

More detailed information about the study procedures can be found under “What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?”

Is there any way that being in this study could be bad for me?

There is no greater than minimal risk for you. You may feel emotional distress related to experiences with bullying, gender dysphoria, or sexual orientation depending on lived experiences you share during the interview.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

There are no benefits to you from your taking part in this research beyond documenting your experiences. We cannot promise any benefits to others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to others include sharing your stories with a wider readership who may learn from your experiences.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

There are no known alternatives, other than deciding not to participate in this research study.

Detailed Information About This Research Study

The following is more detailed information about this study in addition to the information listed above.

How many people will be studied?

We expect between 3 and 10 people will be in this research study.

What happens if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research”?

Rose will schedule a time to meet with you over Zoom for an interview. She will ask you questions about how you make sense of your racial, gender, and sexual identities such as:

1. Who most helped you to develop your current understanding of yourself?
2. What is your earliest memory related to your racial, gender, and sexual identities?
3. What cultural values, beliefs, or ideals that influence your identities today were passed on to you, and by whom?

Rose will record and transcribe this interview. She will share the transcription with you to make sure you are still comfortable including it in her dissertation.

What happens if I say “Yes”, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research study at any time and no one will be upset by your decision.

If you decide to leave the research study, contact the investigator so that the investigator will cancel your interview or delete the recording.

Choosing not to be in this study or to stop being in this study will not result in any penalty to you or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. This means that your choice not to be in this study will not negatively affect your right to your present or future employment.

If you decide to withdraw from this study, your data will be safely deleted.

Will it cost me anything to participate in this research study?

- There will be no cost to you for any of the study activities or procedures.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and medical records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete confidentiality. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (ETHICAL REVIEW BOARD), the committee that provides ethical and regulatory oversight of research, and other representatives of this institution, including those that have responsibilities for monitoring or ensuring compliance.

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential if you choose to use a pseudonym.

What will be done with my data when this study is over?

Your data will not be used for any future research after this study is complete.

Will anyone besides the study team be at my consent meeting?

You may be asked by the study team for your permission for an auditor to observe your consent meeting. Observing the consent meeting is one way that the University of Minnesota makes sure that your rights as a research participant are protected. The auditor is there to observe the consent meeting, which will be carried out by the people on the study team. The auditor will not document any personal (e.g. name, date of birth) or confidential information about you. The auditor will not observe your consent meeting without your permission ahead of time.

Whom do I contact if I have questions, concerns or feedback about my experience?

This research has been reviewed and approved by an ETHICAL REVIEW BOARD within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at [612-625-1650](tel:612-625-1650) (Toll Free: 1-888-224-8636) or go to z.umn.edu/participants. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research

team.

- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Will I have a chance to provide feedback after the study is over?

The HRPP may ask you to complete a survey that asks about your experience as a research participant. You do not have to complete the survey if you do not want to. If you do choose to complete the survey, your responses will be anonymous.

If you are not asked to complete a survey, but you would like to share feedback, please contact the study team or the HRPP. See the “Investigator Contact Information” of this form for study team contact information and “Whom do I contact if I have questions, concerns or feedback about my experience?” of this form for HRPP contact information.

Appendix B. Photovoice Worksheet

Photovoice Project

What is this?

We're going to make questions as a group that we think are important for learning about our lives at school. Then, we're going to take pictures to answer those questions using instant cameras. Finally, we're going to talk to Rose about our pictures so that she can learn more about us and our lives at school.

What questions are important to me?

This is a space where you can brainstorm some questions that you think adults at the school might not think about. Here are some examples of possible questions that I wonder about:

1. Where can I be myself in school?
2. Where do I feel safe in school?
3. Where do I learn to act in certain ways at school?
4. Where do I feel afraid at school?

This is a space where you can write down some more questions that you think are important.

What questions are important to us?

Now that you've thought of a few questions, we're going to choose the ones that we like best as a group. We'll use these questions to guide our photo taking. Write the questions we decided on below so that you do not forget!

A few ground rules before you go take your photos:

1. Let's take pictures of **places, not people**.
2. If you do include a person in your picture for any reason, please mark their face out with a sharpie so that Rose doesn't know who it is during our conversations about your pictures!
3. If you are taking a picture of a locker room or bathroom BE SURE IT IS EMPTY FIRST!!! We do not want to make anyone feel uncomfortable!
4. Take good care of the cameras so that other students can use them when you're done!

5. -----

6. -----

7. -----

8. -----

Appendix C. Photovoice Interview Protocol

Hello ____! Thank you for talking with me today. I am going to ask you some questions about the photos that you took this week. We'll take about one class period to talk. One important thing to remember is that I have to report anything that you tell me about abuse or neglect at home. Do you have any questions before we start?

Great! Before we start, I'll be using different names to keep your identity secret. What name would you like for me to use when I write about you?

Let's take a look at your photos.

1. Can you remind me of what our questions were for this project?
2. Which photo is your favorite and why?
3. I am curious about this photo. Would you please tell me more about it?
4. When you look at these photos, how do they make you feel?
5. What did you learn during this photo project?
6. Is there anything that you think I am forgetting to ask you?

Thanks so much for sharing your photos and thoughts with me today.

Appendix D. Social Media Diary Worksheet

Social Media Diary Project

What is this social media diary project?

This is a project where you get to pay attention to how much time you spend on social media each day. You'll write about social media spaces that connect with your identities or where you experience bullying in the form above to share with us. Rose thinks that social media is really cool and wants to learn more about how you use it.

How long will I write in this diary?

You'll write in this diary each class for two weeks (5 times total).

Will anything else happen?

If you get permission from your parent or guardian, Rose will also ask you some questions about this diary to learn more about how you use social media, especially for expressing your identities. If you do not get permission, you won't participate in this part of the activity.

Date	Types of Social Media Used Today (list)	Web addresses or screen shots (if appropriate)	How this social media relates to your identities or bullying

Appendix E. Social Media Diary Interview Protocol

Hello ____! Thank you for talking with me today. I am going to ask you some questions about your social media journal. We'll take about one class period to talk. One important thing to remember is that while I'll keep almost everything you tell me secret, I have to report anything that you tell me about abuse or neglect at home. Do you have any questions before we start?

Great! Before we start, do you still like the name ____ as the name I will use when I write about you?

Let's take a look at your social media journal.

1. Can you remind me of what our questions were for this project?
2. You mentioned ____ a lot in your journal. Can you tell me more about that?
3. I am curious about this entry. What was happening here?
4. When you look at what you wrote, how does it make you feel?
5. What did you learn during this social media journal project?
6. Is there anything that you think I am forgetting to ask you?

Thanks so much for sharing your journal and thoughts with me today.

Appendix F. Health Interview Protocol

Hello ____! Thank you for talking with me today. I am going to ask you some questions about the health class you are taking. We'll take about one class period to talk. One important thing to remember is that while I'll keep almost everything you tell me secret, I have to report anything that you tell me about abuse or neglect at home or sexual behavior with anyone over 18. Do you have any questions before we start?

Great! Before we start, do you still like the name _____ as the name I will use when I write about you?

Okay, let's jump right into it!

1. What did you think of the health education class that you are taking?
2. How did you feel when you are in the health class? Would you be willing to explain a bit more about that?
3. What information did you learn that you think is important? What about it makes you feel like it is important?
4. What information did you learn that wasn't so important? What about that information makes you feel like it is unimportant?
5. What do you wish you could have learned in class? Would you be willing to tell me a bit more about that?
6. Have your classmates changed their behavior since that class in any way?
7. Is there anything that I forgot to ask that you'd like to talk about?

Thanks so much for sharing your journal and thoughts with me today.

Appendix G. Adult Interview Protocol

Hello, _____. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me today. We'll be talking in depth about your experiences with your racial, gender, and sexual identities. I predict that the interview will take around two hours, but it really depends on how much you want to tell me. Before we begin, I'd like to talk with you a bit about using pseudonyms. Would you prefer to use your own name or choose a different name for this research? If you would like to choose a different name, what name would you like to use?

Great! Thanks. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

Okay, first, I am going to ask you a bit about your family and educational background and then we'll continue on to questions more focused on your identities.

1. Please tell me a bit about where you grew up, your family, and the kinds of schools you attended.
 - a. Was this a rural, urban, or suburban community?
 - b. Could you share a bit more about your schooling? (prompts if asked: memories with classmates, class sizes, teachers)
2. How do you identify yourself today?
3. Who most helped you to develop your current understanding of yourself?
4. What is your earliest memory related to your racial, gender, and sexual identities?
5. What cultural values, beliefs, or ideals that influence your identities today were passed on to you, and by whom?
6. Do you recall any times when you were taught about racial, gender, and sexual identities by your family? How do you think those lessons affected you?
7. Was it a struggle for you when you were growing up to match your own attitudes towards gender and sexuality with those of society?
8. What did you learn about yourself, including your racial, gender, and sexual identities, during your years at school?
 - a. Do you recall any moments in your elementary school experience that have impacted how you think about your identity? Could you tell me more about this?
 - b. Do you recall any moments from your secondary schooling experience that have impacted how you think about your identity? Could you tell me more about this?
 - c. Do you recall any moments from your college experience that have impacted how you think about your identity? Could you tell me more about this?
 - d. Do you recall any particular moments that made you feel like limiting your expression of your identities? What happened at these times?
 - e. Do you recall any particular moments that made you feel supported in your expression of your identities? What happened in those moments?

9. Could you share a time, incident or experience that was important for you in regard to affirming_____ identity?
 - a. What about that experience or incidence was particularly supportive for your identity?
10. Were there particular experiences that constrained the expression of your _____identity?
Could you tell me about them?
11. What in-person or online communities are you a member of?
12. What role, if any, has social media played in your understanding and expression of your identities?
13. What is the most important contribution you've made to your communities?
14. What is the most important contribution that your communities have made to you?

Is there anything that you'd like to add that we have not talked about today?